



Quarterly Review

Winter 2024



MINISTER'S REFLECTION

Dear ones,

In 2019, the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Stamford created a Mission Statement. That statement to “Embrace a Welcoming Community, Nurture Spiritual Growth, and Live Our Values in the World” has guided the work of this congregation since I first joined you as Minister in the Fall of 2021. Our work together in that first year focused on re-gathering to embrace the welcoming community as we adjusted to in person congregational life in a post-pandemic world. We built thriving Worship and Membership Ministries to weave the threads of connection, welcome newcomers, and create embodied multigenerational celebrations of life. In our second year together, we prioritized deepening those connections through the expansion of our small group ministries and spiritual practices such as Wellspring and Vespers, and the alignment of our Religious Education classes with our congregation-wide Soul Matters themes.

Now in our third year together, we are moving outward as we strengthen those ministries which help us to live our values in the world together. These are not easy times and those values of love, justice, and interdependence are so desperately needed. Over the past few months, our hearts have been broken by a world in turmoil, as the violence in Palestine and Israel hits home. We are worried about climate change, economic inequity, and threats to our democracy and civil rights in this year of national election. We continue to hold in our hearts the unhoused, the children living in poverty,

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the undocumented immigrants, and the refugees who are our neighbors here in Stamford. And yet, we have done much more than simply feel anxiety and sadness; we have also come together to act. Some of this action is visible in the public square- like the twelve UUC congregants who demanded an end to fossil fuels at the New York City Climate March in September, or the fourteen of us who showed up at Bethel AME in Stamford to rally for the continuation of Martin Luther King's vision of the beloved community. Other actions have taken place within and among us here at UUC through the work of holding difficult conversations to build right relationship: for instance through discussions of this year's UUA Common Read book *On Repentance and Repair* by Danya Ruttenberg, or the intentional conversations of our growing Anti-Oppression Team meetings. We also have an interfaith partnership of contemplative music for peace ministry developing with Temple Sinai through our Religious Education youth and Vespers Village Choir, and a continued commitment of support for Pacific House, Filling in the Blanks (FITB), and other organizations which provide direct service to local people in need. Our last FITB meal packing event to fight child hunger in November was our largest group yet!

These are difficult times, and all of our hearts, hands, and voices are needed! Over the next few months, we have the chance to envision the people we want to be here in Stamford and in the world, as our new strategic planning steering team will be listening to all of you to help move our mission statement into a clear, tangible, and powerful vision for our future. This is an exciting time to be a member of UUC! I am proud to serve this congregation as we continue our work of learning to lead with love.

In faith,

Rev. Terri





PRESIDENT'S LETTER

June Jordan wrote, in part, in her Poem for South African Women:

*“And who will join this standing up
And the ones who stood without sweet company
Will sing and sing
Back to the mountain's and
If necessary
Even under the sea.
We are the ones we have been waiting for”*



The musical group, “Sweet Honey in the Rock” captured this in song as did Susan Frederick Gray in her President's Report at UUA General Assembly in 2022 when she said “we are the people we have been waiting for. And Barack Obama also intoned “we are the ones we've been waiting for” while stumping for the presidency.

But, closer to home, what does this mean in our own UU community?

Here at UUC at our congregational conversation in October, we talked about “The Power of WE” a concept brought forth from the UUA about what it means to be a faith community---not only how to develop our own notion of spirituality but how to live our values in the world. At this gathering many individuals spoke from the heart of when they felt “the power of we” in their congregational life. There were many examples and there were many questions as well.

I have noticed as we grow, we may be experiencing some “growing pains” Some of us are strategists , eager to create structure, align vision, and work on policies and procedures---to align Board members with committees, to create a vision of where we want to be in the next 10, 20, 30 years. Some of us are activists, working on the issues of the unhoused, marching on MLK day, doing anti-oppression work and participating in the “boots on the ground” project “filling in the blanks. Some of us are reaching for spiritual growth through Soul Matters, Wellspring, Vespers or participating in the UU Common Read “On Repentance and Repair.” Some of us are interested in caring for others and so joined the Care Team. Some of us are looking for connection through Afternoon Adventurers, Potlucks, lunches, and informal connections in coffee hour. Some of us are eager to engage with our children and youth in our RE program.

As we move forward in 2024, there is room for all of us to sit at the table and engage in “The Power of We.” If you are looking for a place to connect and don't know where to begin, please feel free to contact Reverend Terri or any people on the UUC Board of Trustees.

“We are the ones we've been waiting for.” And we're waiting for you!

Warmly,
Lynne



Now let us take time to look back and celebrate some of the key moments in our shared lives that took place this past Fall and Winter!

CONTINUING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH FILLING IN THE BLANKS

By Katy Fetzer



We continue our relationship with Filling in the Blanks (FITB) in Norwalk, a non-profit providing weekend meals to local families in need. Food that is packed by volunteers is distributed through schools and discreetly slipped into students' back packs for delivery home to help fill a gap on weekends when kids lack access to school provided meals. In addition to volunteering at food packing events, we have also supported FITB through "Sharing the Plate."

Diane Jones and Nora Geissert have worked to organize our efforts with FITB, coordinating our participation in packing events and exploring ways to potentially broaden our involvement. The next packing event will be held on Saturday, March 30 from 1-3:00.

Nora first learned of Filling in the Blanks at a Social Justice Committee meeting at UUC and the mission of the organization resonated with her personally. "I can speak from experience as to what an important role FITB plays in helping our local youth." Nora describes how while growing up her family was dependent upon free meals given at school, and how she and her sisters benefitted from such programs that allowed them to focus on their studies as opposed to where their next meal was coming from.

As our congregation grows, Nora hopes to see our support of Filling in the Blanks grow by attending more packing events and supporting their mobile outreach effort. Plus, the packing events are a great team bonding event for us as a congregation!

To learn more about Filling in the Blanks and their mission, [visit their website](#).

SPIRITUAL DEEPENING THROUGH UUC WELLSPRING

By Pam Bruno

UU Wellspring is a program of spiritual deepening for Unitarian Universalists. Group members experience deep listening and spiritual reflection in small groups, and in between sessions they complete assignments focused on spiritual topics and UU Theology.

Our first Wellspring group began their journey last year, and when the year one foundational course was completed, all six members went on to participate in a second year program. John Umlauf is facilitating this second year, while Rev. Terri is guiding a new group through the original Wellspring "Sources" course.





Here is what some participants have to say about their Wellspring experience so far:

“Wellspring for me is a constant invitation to show up as my true and unique self... and to honor each person as they show up in their own true and unique way. Together, we engage enduring themes that challenge us into wholeness and community. What could be more exciting?”

-John Umlauf

“I started Wellspring hoping to find deeper meaning and found so much more. Not just a group of people I can have deep discussions with and have come to value as friends, but a deeper sense of who I am and of the universe in general. A spirituality I didn't even realize I possessed...”

-Katherine Fetzer

“I had reached a stage where I felt I wanted to strengthen the spiritual side of my life and so I signed up for Wellspring. The readings and discussions have been inspiring and opened up new ways of seeing the world. Rev. Terri and John Umlauf have provided a safe space for these sessions and I treasure the relationships that continue to deepen.”

-Bonnie Currie

“When health issues found me in a dark place earlier this winter, I found support and inspiration through Wellspring. The deep listening and sharing with the cohort have helped quiet my mind, while an assigned reading on “Wintering” helped create a transformation in my thinking and a different lens from which to view this time in my life.”

-Bobbie Rich

“In the inaugural year of Wellspring, I was drawn by the prospect of a meaningful and immersive spiritual journey... Wellspring has profoundly impacted my perception of spiritual practice, emphasizing its personal and communal aspects. It has also deepened my understanding of the traditions underpinning our UU values, creating a richer connection to our principles. The takeaways extend beyond individual growth, highlighting the importance of collective exploration and learning.”

-Rajesh Singh

RE UPDATE

By Andrew Laro

While I've been helping to compile and send out the quarterly newsletter for a few years now, this is my first written contribution to the quarterly review. It is such an honor to be more involved in the life and ministry of this incredible congregation! Below are some highlights from the past several months:

When I began working as your Coordinator of Religious Education and Communications, the most immediate need I identified was the need for a written safety policy for RE. This is one of the most important aspects of any RE program, as it ensures the safety of both children and UUC volunteers. An RE safety policy is not only protects RE, but the entire community of UUC Stamford. This was a major undertaking, but one that was well worth the work. After consulting numerous researchers and sharing wisdom with several of my colleagues, I drafted a safety policy what was unanimously approved by the board. This policy is now in effect and can be [viewed here](#). Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions!



Additionally, I'm proud to share that we recently hired a new childcare worker to help care for our littlest members! Kiki Suarez is a recent graduate from Southern Connecticut State University with a bachelor's degree in elementary and special education. She began working with us on February 4th, and is an amazing addition to the RE team. Kiki will be working alongside Zoe, who has been working in the nursery for some time, to provide childcare for infants and toddlers during Sunday morning worship. Please give her a warm welcome when you see her on Sundays!

October saw our middle schoolers go on their first Neighboring Faiths visit to Temple Sinai. With the help of Maria Lassman, we learned a bit about Jewish tradition, worship, and religious beliefs before attending Temple Sinai's musical Ruach service. Afterwards, I led the middle schoolers in a group reflection on our experience. All of our students were left with a sense of wonder and an appreciation for the Jewish tradition. We even wrote thank you cards to some of Temple Sinai's community members to thank them for their incredible hospitality!

In December, I hosted an improv themed AroUUnd the Table event for our RE families. After enjoying some delicious pizza, I led the families in various improv games. We had an absolute blast! Not only did we share joyous laughter together, but we learned how to be brave, trust ourselves, and not take ourselves too seriously. This picture is from that event. I have no idea what was going on in the scene we were acting out, but we were definitely having tons of fun!



In January, I met with some of our middle schoolers to talk about the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. We discussed how Dr. King's message has been softened and appropriated over time, so we have a responsibility to remember just how radical this man was and to continue to challenge the systems of power and racial injustice today. We even made signs for Bethel AME's MLK Day March!

I'm so excited to continue working with our RE program to foster community and to learn and explore together. We can never have too many folks involved, so if you'd like to join this amazing work in any capacity, don't hesitate to reach out to me!

Yours in love,
Andrew Laro



HONORING MLK'S LEGACY



UUC Stamford participated in a variety of events this year, forging connections with different faith communities and showing our commitment to Martin Luther King's vision of the beloved community. On MLK day, thirteen UUC congregants joined Rev Terri to participate in a rally at Bethel AME in downtown Stamford, followed by a two-mile march.



UUC STAMFORD PRIORITIZES SOCIAL CONNECTION

Standing groups such as Fiber Arts, Game Night and Writer's Circle continue to meet and offer congregants and friends a chance to connect around shared interests. A UUC social tradition, the Friday Potluck dinner, was back this month, with **Bonnie Wagner** as a first time event organizer.



A long time tradition known as Ladies that Lunch was "re-branded" last year around a theme of Afternoon Adventure – and is open to all who wish to gather in friendship and fun. In addition to consistently breaking bread at Zody's every third Wednesday of the month, the Adventurers stepped out late last Fall to enjoy time in nature at both Cove Island Park in Stamford and Grace Farms in New Canaan. Stay tuned for upcoming adventures!





QUIET CONTEMPLATION - VESPERS BEGINS ITS SECOND YEAR

By Katy Fetzer

Vespers is an evening contemplative service that is offered every second Wednesday at 7:30 pm in the sanctuary at UUC. It is modeled after and inspired by the services at All Souls Church (Unitarian) in Washington D.C. Vespers is a service that draws on several traditions, including that of the Taizé monastic community in France and various Eastern religions.

Vespers began at UUC a little over a year ago, and under the leadership of Elizabeth Jenkins-Sahlin, with the “Vespers Village,” a committed group of UUC congregants who sing and support Elizabeth in making Vespers happen) the evenings have evolved from live streaming All Souls Vespers, to putting together our own services.

The hope is that Vespers continues to evolve as a music ministry, and engage more participation. Already, the instrumental presence has grown from cello and viola (or just cello), to include piano and percussion as well. Many of the musicians are professionals who donate their time, including Gunnar Sahlin on cello, Suzanne Corey-Sahlin on viola, and Marc Chan on piano.

The dim lighting and candlelight at the Vespers services creates a very calming and meditative environment, further enhanced by the readings and chants. The communal aspect has created close bonds between participants, as we have grown together in community and song.

Anyone who is interested is encouraged to reach out to [Elizabeth](#). All are welcome!



ST. LUCIA CELEBRATION AT UUC MARKS ITS THIRD YEAR

The third annual St Lucia day celebration at UUC, spearheaded by Elizabeth Jenkins-Sahlin, took place on December 13th. This Swedish tradition, with roots tracing back to St Lucia of Syracuse in Italy, has become a fun way to bond and spread good cheer through downtown Stamford. A group of more than one dozen congregants and friends gathered in the Community Room to learn more about the tradition and to practice songs with a Swedish pianist, before proceeding down Bedford Street.





EMERSON HALL FOUNDATION UPDATE

After several years of laying the groundwork, choosing a name, finding a pro bono attorney, becoming incorporated, creating a Board -- Emerson Hall Foundation has finally hit the ground running!

- In September, we became incorporated.
- In November, we held our Inaugural Concert, featuring Cyrus Von Hochstetter at the piano, with a reception following in the Community Room.



- In December, we received a Stamford Arts & Culture Grant in support of a concert featuring Randal Despommier, an alto saxophonist and his jazz group.
- In January, Gunnar Sahlin and his group performed on January 28th at 3:00 in Emerson Hall.
- Randal's concert is at a date to be determined, and we are also exploring hosting an art exhibit, featuring our own UU artists, in connection with Downtown Special Services Arts & Crafts on Bedford in the spring.

Our Mission is to preserve and promote our historic building. Clearly, we have been promoting our space as a community resource. On the preserving front, we have met with a "Circuit Rider" from Preservation Connecticut, an arm of the Connecticut Historic Commission. He was very helpful in providing resources and leads. In the coming months, we will be reaching out to the Historic Preservation community to establish relationships and seek funding in order to fulfill both aspects of our mission. We are also working closely with the UUC Board to create guidelines for our relationship. This will be a work in progress as events arise.

Once we have established this relationship and our credibility in the community, we will be looking to add members from the community to our Emerson Hall Board and/or Advisory Committee. Our current Board includes:

Bonnie Currie
Maria Lassman
Frances Sink
Jay Fountain

Ellen Garcia
Janis Stahlhut
Doreen Banks



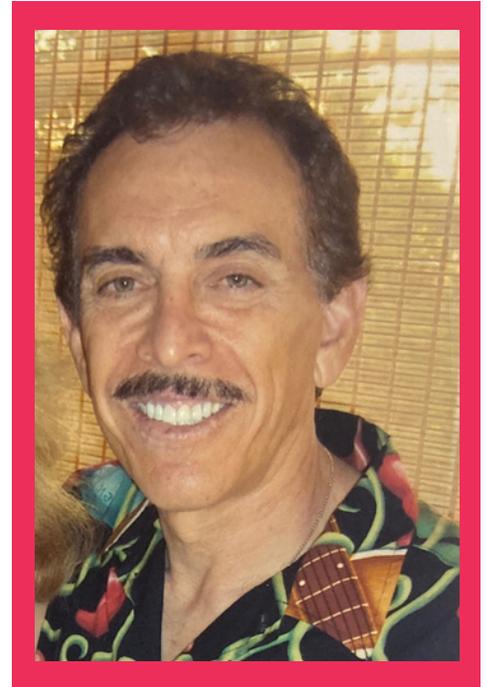
IN LOVING MEMORY OF UUC STAMFORD CONGREGANT ARNOLD (ARNIE) DIAZ (1949-2023) - A HEART AS WIDE AS HIS SMILE

By Pam Bruno

His former colleagues called him a class act, a beloved co-worker, a NY TV legend. Known for his investigative journalism that championed the rights of the “little guy”, Arnold Diaz was a fixture in my living room growing up, where as a young teen I delighted to his signature mantra, “Shame on You” and his courageous reporting that put the bad guys in their place.

Diaz’s career spanned 5 decades, included more than one thousand news stories, and earned him 48 Emmys. Yet his professional accomplishments only touch on the story of the man we at UUC came to know and love toward the end of his career.

When I met Arnie I believe he had already been diagnosed and was being treated for multiple myeloma. Though he didn’t speak of his diagnosis until several months before he died, it became clear that this was a man who was not being defined by cancer, not giving up, and very much determined to embrace life with gratitude.



Arnie and I began attending Sunday services at about the same time. In fact, our names are listed together in the UUC membership book. Like many, I was impressed with Arnie’s generous spirit and his kind attentive nature. Always quick to smile, to reassure, to listen thoughtfully -- I left every interaction with Arnie feeling heard and cared for. And when we joined the same Soul Matters circle, my appreciation for Arnie became even greater.

Sitting in a covenanted circle such as Soul Matters, can be a struggle for those who like to “cross talk, fix, and save” – but Arnie was a natural at not doing those things. He generously and effortlessly held space for others - and when it was time for him to share, he shared from his heart. His Soul Matters cohort watched him become more and more vulnerable as our ties grew tighter over the years together. He was clearly devoted to his wife Shawn – as he spoke of her frequently and with gentle admiration. His three children and twin grandsons were also featured in stories told with great pride.

When I learned of Arnie’s death I read the news stories that detailed his professional accomplishments. One article quoted Arnie back in 2022 speaking about his career and commenting that he “had no regrets.” I would also assert that Arnie lived life without regrets. In the years that I knew him he practiced gratitude and lived in the present moment. He spoke with candor, kindness, and exuded an authenticity and optimism that were inspiring. I hope he knows how much he was admired. If there is a heaven, I do believe Arnie is there now, listening to his favorite jazz tunes and wearing his signature smile.