

Summer | 2021

# Chalice Connection

A quarterly publication  
of The First Unitarian  
Church of Omaha

Volume 2 Issue 3



In this issue,  
we focus on  
the theme of  
Play

Join us this  
Sunday online at  
10:30am via Zoom

**Mission of First Unitarian Church of Omaha:  
Fostering the Whole Person, Compassion, and Justice**

[www.firstuomaha.org](http://www.firstuomaha.org)

**MINISTER MESSAGE:  
Playing Together**

*Rev. Shari Woodbury continues  
to discuss covenants and how  
we can play well together.*

PAGE 2

**ANNUAL AWARDS:  
Celebrate Friends**

*The Nominating Committee  
shares this year's award winners  
that were announced at the  
Annual Meeting in May.*

PAGES 5, 10, & 11

**NEIGHBORHOOD  
CARE**

*Families gathered in May to work  
on a project to help folks in our  
neighborhood.*

PAGE 9

**CARAVAN PHOTO  
BOOTH**

*Fun was had by all at our playful  
photo booth during our June  
caravan.*

PAGE 13



## Minister's Message

# Playing Together

By Rev. Shari Woodbury

Ah, sum- sum- summertime... the season of play for all ages. Church is one of the places we play – through music and other forms of creativity, in social get-togethers, by stories and light-hearted learning. We play to celebrate the gift of life and the milestones in our particular lives. We play for the sheer joy of playing – something I hope we'll be doing a lot more together in the coming year, as we regroup from the pandemic and make up for lost fun.

Do you play well with others? We try to teach our children how to do this, while we grown-ups continue sharpening our own skills as social beings. As a church community, relational covenants are one of the tools we use to support safe, brave, and rewarding ways of being together. In addition to the congregation's overall Covenant of Right Relations, specific subgroups or relationships may be supported by a tailored covenant. This past year, I've shared covenants created or revised among our core staff group, and between myself and the Board of Trustees.

Here, I share with you another type of covenant: one between ministry colleagues. When more than one minister is present in a congregation - whether they are all on the church staff, some work in the community, or there are retired or emeritus ministers actively connected to the church – the best practice is to create a covenant. I'm delighted to have Sarah Voss, a hospital chaplain and mediator, as a colleague who belongs to this congregation. We share here part of the covenant we have developed together (see next page). I also include the covenant referenced that all members of the UU Ministers Association affirm.

(To see the full Code of Conduct, of which that covenant is a part, go to [www.uuma.org/page/guidelines](http://www.uuma.org/page/guidelines).)

These collegial documents illustrate features common to many UU covenants:

- mutual commitment, and accountability that is shared as well as individual
- the importance and value of direct communication
- covenants as living documents that may be revised over time
- concern for impact over intent, and commitment to deepening self-awareness
- third-party support available when needed (a UUMA good officer in the case of ministry colleagues, our Right Relations Committee for church members)
- aspirations rooted not in perfection, but in love

As Sarah's poem (in the sidebar) expresses so beautifully, for covenants to be effective we must come to them with open hearts. For the spirit of covenant is really not so much about "playing by the rules" as it is an ongoing practice of right relationship with each other.

Sincerely, imperfectly,  
lovingly,

*Shari*

### How to Reach the Minister

Email:  
[minister@firstuomaha.org](mailto:minister@firstuomaha.org)

Church phone:  
(402) 345-3039 ext. 102  
(forwards to her cell)

Cell phone: (531) 600-8313

She typically checks email on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. For a pastoral emergency any day, please call or text her cell phone.

To schedule an appointment, go to: <https://calendly.com/rev-woodbury>

### Collegial Covenant (a poem by Sarah Voss, excerpted and shared with permission)

I promise  
to love, honor, and trust you  
as my friend and ministerial colleague

to do right by you to the best of my ability  
to remember the enthusiasm behind this promise  
and the hope that gave it birth

...I will always pay attention  
to the poetry of our relationship  
because when the poetry is missing  
it's just guidelines, not a promise.

**Collegial Covenant (excerpted)  
between Rev. Shari Woodbury, Settled Minister  
& Rev. Sarah Voss, Affiliated Community Minister**

We covenant to foster a collegial relationship with intention and ongoing communication. Believing that our professional relationships promote a culture for all congregational relationships, we covenant to bring honesty, integrity, respect, and a collegial spirit to our interactions. We will practice and promote direct communication with each other and between congregants and ourselves in matters of appreciation, concern or conflict, avoiding triangulated relationships. We will abide by the UUMA guidelines in our speech and actions and we will respect one another's work and personal boundaries.

Rev. Voss shall seek to ensure that her behavior and words support the effective ministry of Rev. Woodbury at the church. Rev. Woodbury, in turn, shall seek to ensure that her behavior and words support Rev. Voss' ministry in the community. We may meet periodically to foster a mutually supportive collegial relationship and will endeavor to be transparent, caring, and helpful to each other in all our interactions.

We recognize that our ministries, our relationships, and this congregation will change; as such, so will this covenant. When and where appropriate, we will enlist the aid of an impartial observer (such as a UUMA Good Officer) to help us. We hold ourselves and each other accountable to this covenant and we commit to revisiting and modifying it as needed.

**UU Ministers Association Covenant  
(affirmed by all UUMA members)**

United in our call to serve the spirit of love and justice through the vocation of ministry in the liberal religious tradition, we, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, covenant with one another:

- To conduct ourselves with integrity, honoring the trust placed in us;
- To embody in our lives the values that we proclaim on behalf of our faith;
- To support one another in collegial respect and care, understanding and honoring the diversity within our association;
- To hold ourselves accountable to each other for the competent exercise of our vocation;
- To use our power constructively and with intention, mindful of our potential unconsciously to perpetuate systems of oppression;
- To seek justice and right relations according to our evolving collective wisdom, and to refrain from all abuse or exploitation;
- To cultivate practices of deepening awareness, understanding, humility, and commitment to our ideals;
- To labor earnestly together for the well being of our communities and the progress of Unitarian Universalism.

We recognize that none of us is perfect and all are works in progress. We hold one another in love as, through fidelity to this covenant and our Code of Professional Conduct, we aspire to grow in wholeness, and bring hope and healing to the world.



Pictured: Rev. Shari with colleagues from N. America and Romania during a 2018 pilgrimage to Transylvania that brought colleagues together for history, celebration, fun, and friendship.

## Inescapable Blackness Response

On April 8, several members of First Unitarian Church were privileged to share an interactive Zoom conversation with Chaplain Crystall Williams on the topic, “Inescapable Blackness: A Chaplain’s Perspective.”

Crystall Williams is a full-time chaplain at Methodist Hospital. Many thanks to First Unitarian member, Sarah Voss, herself a chaplain, for introducing us to Crystall. The purpose of the discussion was to invite a predominantly white audience to broaden their perspectives and understand how others live differently. Through candidly sharing her life experiences as a person of African heritage, Crystall invited us to expand our human experience and compassion.

**We asked the participants in the discussion to offer their responses. Here are some of the thoughtful comments we received:**

**Sarah Voss:** Crystall’s warm presence and thoughtful comments open doors to a deeper understanding of Black/White relations. Her many vignettes and illustrations speak to all races and offer a ministry of healing to those who listen and attend. I am so happy to have gotten to know Chaplain Crystall through my work at Methodist Hospital and to be able to call her both colleague and friend.

**Harriet Major:** I found Crystall’s presentation to be enlightening because it was written from a Black American’s experiences. I think it was especially helpful to a mostly white audience, many of whom were not familiar with the real life of people of color.

**Kim Dunovan:** Thank you for helping to arrange for Chaplain Crystall to speak to us. She is so brave, honest, kind and open-hearted. It was truly a gift to hear her speak.

**Kay Lynn Goldner:** I appreciated the program with Chaplain Crystall. It was so interesting and important to hear from someone like her about her daily (sadly) negative reminders of being Black. I have had the opportunity to know and work with a Black family through being a CASA (court-appointed special advocate) for many years, but have not heard personally about what must happen to them, too. I do know that one of the young men of that family has really experienced radical injustice over and over which is dreadful. Chaplain Crystall’s comments reminded me that many white people say things that are hurtful and ugly without even thinking what it does to the Black person. While there have been many strides in opportunities for people of color, I was reminded that how Black people are mistreated in ways are so damaging to them. I try to imagine how I would feel if that was something that I had to be on guard about all the time. I would not do well at all. Her comments about how she feels when white people say they don’t see her Blackness was interesting. The open conversation was helpful and I hope that another session could be held sometime. Thanks to the Sister Church Team.

**Vanessa Timberlake:** I found Chaplain Crystall’s presentation incredibly moving. Listening to her describe her experiences was intensely shocking. She further opened my eyes to the harsh realities black people face in Omaha every day of their lives, and it is easy to understand how exhausting it is to live with such undeserved stress. I appreciated Bill Howard’s comments on what his life is like as well. I hope the church will consider having her speak to us again in the future.

**Suzanne King:**

1. Eye opening and expansive. Thank you for organizing it.
2. I look forward to Part 2.
3. Mostly the same people as the White Ally and Third Harmony events.

4. Wonder if she would collaborate with Shari or your group (Sister Church Team) to do a Sunday service to expand the church audience.

5. What most sticks with me today is her comments about how Blacks have such strong trust in God because there’s so little for them to trust in government, law enforcement, non-black society in general. Explains the importance and prominence of the Black church in a way I never considered.

### Moving forward:

The Sister Church Team was pleased to arrange this “Inescapable Blackness” discussion with Crystall Williams. The meeting was so enlightening and provocative that the group decided to extend the conversation to a second meeting. That event took place on Thursday, May 27. Crystall also indicated an interest in having similar discussions with other groups and the Sister Church Team encourages these expanding conversations with others at First Unitarian.

For more information about our Sister Church Team, go here: [www.firstuomaha.org/sisterchurch](http://www.firstuomaha.org/sisterchurch).

If you would like to reach out to the team, please email: [sisterchurch@firstuomaha.org](mailto:sisterchurch@firstuomaha.org).

### Chalice Connection

**Editor:** Catharine Dixon

**Proofreaders:**

Scott Kemper, Suzanne King, Lois Norris, & Carolyn McNamara

Please submit articles, poems, photos: [admin@firstuomaha.org](mailto:admin@firstuomaha.org).

**Word count limit: 1,000 words. If your plan involves a longer piece, please contact the office. Notes: 1. Articles will be approved by the Editor, the Office Team, and in some cases in conjunction with the staff and MTC. 2. All articles will be subject to editing. 3. Articles must comply with the First Unitarian Communication Policy. More information can be obtained by emailing the church office.**

**Deadline for the October issue: 9/1/2021**

## Annual Awards: A Time to Celebrate Our Friends

Every year, our Nominating Committee asks for nominations for our annual awards. These winners are announced at our Annual Meeting. Below are brief descriptions of why our winners were chosen—the exact words that were shared at our Zoom Annual Meeting in May. Be sure to congratulate our award winners!

### Joe Schaaf's text:

As this year's Past President, it has been my honor to chair this year's Nominating Committee. The committee consists of Mike McAtee, Mary Kay Peters, Nellie Chenoweth, Katrina Schmidt, Carolyn McNamara, and Sara Switzer. Every single one of them has put in a significant amount of time, and we all took this responsibility quite seriously and with sincerity and love for our community. I will begin this year's list of award winners with the Social Justice Award.

**The Social Justice Award** pays tribute to those who witness to the ideals of social justice and responsibility so important to our UU heritage. I believe that the Social Justice Award is integral to who we are as Unitarians, since so much of what we are about is actually accomplishing the deed and not just stating the creed. This year's award goes to a member of our church who has certainly lived up to that motto. She has been involved in many community betterment activities, including leading our seminar in Compassionate Communication, moderating a discussion group on being a white ally in combating racism, and being a member of our Sister Church team, as well as many other community dialogues. She regularly donates her time to helping those who have been marginalized in our community, and helps them find their path back to society by helping them in restoring their souls to normalcy after a life of hard knocks, and in some cases, incarceration. She is a poet and a spiritual philosopher who has added to the richness of our community tapestry by offering her thoughts and words (usually on Social Justice issues) during our worship service. And quite simply, I believe she is just an all-around beautiful human being!

**This year's award for Social Justice Award goes to Suzanne King.**

**The Religious Education Award** is given to honor an individual or individuals who have made a significant contribution to religious education. This year the award is going to an individual who has been a part of our church for most of her life. She has been a cornerstone of the church community for her whole adult life, and especially in the areas where learning and youth are involved. Given our new Covid environment, in the past year she has stepped up in countless ways to help keep religious education alive during these strange pandemic times. Her "stories for all ages" are always so fantastic and presented with such panache and love for the children. She has often held a critical role in our EMR productions, helping reach us all with her beautiful singing voice. She also helped our DRE organize some unique activities that were "social-distance" friendly, including the First UU Easter Egg Hunt and the Great pUumpkin hunt (with 2 U's of course!) On top of that she also creates very helpful maps (and tutorials on using those maps) for many of these events! She helped organize and implement the church's annual Mystery Friends program, which helps build connections between our youth and adult members. And on top of all that, she has more than frequently stepped up to be a master of ceremonies for many of our Zoom events this year, as well as MC'ing many of our previous events in past years. She has done all of this and more while still managing to deal with all of the stress of being a public school teacher, and more importantly a mother to two wonderful teenage sons. **It is my great pleasure to announce this year's winner of the Religious Education award, our own beloved Kate Wiig.**

### Mary Kay Peters' text:

**The Keeping the Faith Award** was established to recognize people who live by UU principles. It is presented to persons who have worked to keep Unitarian Universalism alive in their community and who touch the lives of congregation and community members in a positive way. Denise Allain has been a member of First Unitarian Church for several years now and has always been very active as a leader of the worship arts team and a group facilitator for her Soul Matters Small Group. She left Omaha and moved back to New England to be near her grown children a couple of years ago but stayed in touch with the First U community from a distance. Of course, this became a lot easier to do after the pandemic hit us and everything went online through Zoom. But specifically, she stepped up and volunteered to lead the worship arts team once again and organize services at First U from New England over the summer, during the midst of the pandemic. She pulled us together at a time when we were temporarily leaderless in between our beloved Interim Minister, Rev. Michelle and our long-awaited and much-anticipated Settled Minister, Rev. Shari. She worked hard from a distance to keep our UU community and faith alive at First U during this time of transition for the church. **It is my honor and privilege to present the Keeping the Faith Award to my soul sister Denise Allain.**

This article continues on page 10

# “...Its Spine’s Been Repaired... And Its Appendix Has Been Removed!”

By Linda Parker, Archives and Library Leader

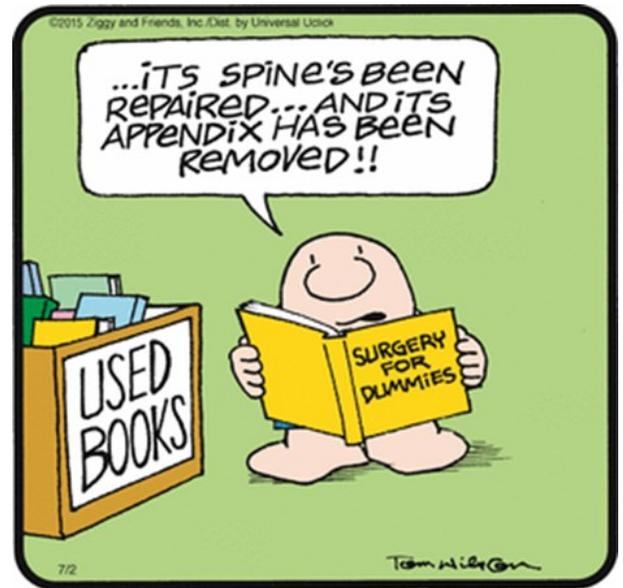
I love to collect cartoons about libraries and reading. This cartoon is an accurate description of the condition of many of the print books in our church library (see sidebar). Before the church closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Archives/Library team was diligently reviewing the collection, updating the card file, discarding moldy books, and dusting the books and shelves. While these tasks may seem tedious and boring, never doubt that a group of Unitarians had a great time discussing the books and debating titles that should or should not remain in the collection.

My decision to enter the library profession was one of my life’s best decisions. Coming of age in the 1960s, I believed in the power of the people and that information was power. And what do libraries and librarians do—we provide information to the people. What a joy to see the proverbial light bulb go off when someone discovers his/her power.

What a joy to know that the Seven Principles supported both my professional life as well as my religious journey. The third and fourth principles are especially meaningful to me.

- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

May the power belong to all of us.



## “Worth the Search”

By Terri Lynn Brewer, Church Member

Searching to Become  
Never coming lost  
Where will happiness be

Searching to Become  
My spiritual unrest  
Let it be calm

Searching to Become  
A real search  
Question reality

Searching to Become  
My heart feels pain  
Smiles may lie

Searching to Become  
No failure never ever  
Breaking free my mind fears not

Restless journey  
Daily praise  
Mine alone my happiness shall Become...



Photo of birds in church garden by Donna Neff

## A Note about *Third Harmony*

By Kim Dunovan

Dear First Unitarian Leaders,

Would your group be interested in a screening and facilitated discussion of the documentary, *Third Harmony: Nonviolence and The New Story of Human Nature*? After two well-received showings of the documentary, our ad hoc Soulforce team, consisting of Rev. Shari, Sharon Conlon, Suzanne King, Mark Loscutoff and Kim Dunovan, is available to provide this same program to other interested groups within the church.

Here's a link to more information about the film, and a short trailer: <https://thirdharmony.org>.

Please contact Kim Dunovan at [kimberly.dunovan@gmail.com](mailto:kimberly.dunovan@gmail.com) or 402-213-6387 if you have questions, or to schedule a screening for your group.

Thanks,  
Kim

## Need Help to Get Vaccinated?

Is transportation, securing an appointment, or some other obstacle standing between you and getting vaccinated? If so, please reach out to [rides@firstuomaha.org](mailto:rides@firstuomaha.org) or call the church office. We don't want anyone seeking a vaccine to have to go without due to such barriers. Caring volunteers are ready to help.

## "Pending"

By Suzanne King,  
Church Member

Pending.

My whole life has been a series  
of pendings. Waiting  
for the next paycheck,  
a perfectly completed project,  
some future court decision,  
countless invented tomorrows,  
more fantasies of another  
chance for shared times.

But, pending never comes  
until after the long-awaited  
opportunity has  
already passed into a future  
that's now present and  
so different from any conjured,  
all while waiting  
for the pending, pending, pending  
to become real.

Refusing to join with the eternal  
impermanence of life itself,  
we rob ourselves  
of being fully alive and of claiming  
our precious morsel of it.  
Lost, the choices we forfeited  
focusing on prospective what ifs,  
delusionally attaching dreams  
to skillfully imagined somedays.

Even this poem  
is pending  
the right  
closing  
word...

# “Play”

By Jennifer Larsen, Church Member

Play in the dirt and the sand  
Get dirty and make a castle  
with a turret or two if you can.

Play with the music in your head  
or start up a band. Play it again and again  
until the music makes sense.

Play with yourself, whatever you see  
in the mirror or through other eyes.  
Make someone new. Create a disguise.

Play with time, that uncle you know  
but don't want to know, that keeps visiting.  
Let it pass by. Don't spend it worrying.

Play with your destiny.  
Keep reaching beyond to those places  
you might but haven't reached quite yet.

Play it all again.  
And as you remember, remember the good  
with the bad. But let the happy overwrite the sad.



Artwork: “Every Which Way” by Jan Wilson

Artwork: “Summer Fun” by Avonelle Reliford



# Neighborhood Care Project in the Church Lot

On Saturday, May 22nd, many families and volunteers gathered to put together 100 Neighborhood Care bags. This RE project will help our church give much-needed food and toiletries to those who come to the church looking for assistance. Thank you to everyone who came to help and to those who gave cash and item donations for the needed supplies.



## Annual Awards—Mary Kay Peters’ text (continued from page 5):

**The Unsung UU Award** affirms those UU’s whose actions inspire, support, and express Unitarian Universalism but have not been previously recognized. The award is given to a person or group whose lifetime activities have made a significant contribution to the cause of Unitarian Universalism. During this past year, we’ve had many people step forward and help keep our community together with our online zoom services, but Lloyd Olson has stood out because of his technical contributions to the Early Morning Risers during the pandemic. He works tirelessly on music preparation for group virtual recordings and copyright licensing. He organizes EMR shared drives with sheet music files and recording reference tracks, including multiple soprano, alto, tenor and bass reference parts for hymns. He does audio mixing and sound sampling for group recordings, vocal additions when needed, and sometimes even video production. He also participates in music selection and he always gets to the heart of Sunday service themes while encouraging the group to push boundaries and limitations. He’s always willing to step up and lend a hand while thinking of others, and he’s committed to the EMR small group ministry of love and justice throughout and within music. And he did all these things while taking care of several members of his family who were sick with Covid this past winter. **It is my honor and pleasure to present the Unsung UU Award to Lloyd Olson.**

### Michael McAtee’s text:

**The Heritage Award** is given to recognize an individual or group who have made a significant contribution to preserving, understanding, and celebrating our Unitarian Universalist history. This year the award goes to an individual who throughout his long association with First Unitarian. He has actively worked to preserve not only our rich history, but the very nature of our church community. Whether it is through his welcoming efforts at coffee hour explaining Unitarian Universalism to newcomers or through his efforts on the membership team where he educated new congregants using a program he helped to create. He is a driving force behind the church’s Atheist Humanist and Agnostic (AHA) group thus preserving, promoting, and celebrating the UU church’s rich history of supporting a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. He is also preserving our history by preserving the very church itself through his leadership in the Preserve Our Building Fund. For these and many other accomplishments, **it is my honor and privilege to announce this year’s Heritage Award recipient, Jaime Alexander.**

### Katrina Schmidt’s text (presented by Mike McAtee at the meeting):

**The Young Adult of the Year Award** is given to recognize an individual (18-35 years old) who has played a vibrant and critical part of our community. **Chynna Jedlicka is receiving the Young Adult of the Year Award** for her exceptional leadership skills, ability to connect and support others, and for going above and beyond in her volunteer positions. Through her tenacity and kindness as leader, the Young Adult group has met on several occasions through Zoom this year. While group invites are expected, she also took the time to connect with individuals and invite them personally. As secretary of CUUPS, she supported the president, Rosharra Owens, by helping in ways outside the general duties of a secretary. Her support led to a successful year of rituals during a worldwide pandemic and even some new innovations such as a beautiful and original CUUPS membership book. When celebrating Ostara, Chynna ran a ritual that led to the highest number of engaged attendees during a Zoom meeting by distributing planting kits beforehand. Chynna allowed people to pick up kits at the church at a designated time, but also took the time to deliver most of them directly to people’s homes. Chynna has also been actively involved with Soul Matters groups and has recently committed to be a facilitator. There are many more contributions Chynna has made and will make and for that we thank you, Chynna. Please accept this award as a small token of the congregation’s grateful appreciation for all that you do.

### Carolyn McNamara’s text:

Each year, at the annual meeting, a member of our church receives our Unitarian of the Year Award to recognize an individual or individuals who have made a difference in our Congregation over the past year.

As you know, this past year has been a real challenge. Because of the pandemic, many of us have felt isolated, cut off from our friends, and struggling to find a way to stay connected.

This article continues on the next page

## Annual Awards—Carolyn McNamara’s text (continued from page 10):

This included our beloved church community. How was a church like ours going to be there for its members? How would it bring its message and a sense of comfort to all of those who have always relied on it?

**I am happy to present this year’s Unitarian of the Year Award to the Zoom Team who did just that!** This band of sisters and brothers created a service on Zoom, (something most of us had never heard of) to present the Sunday service online. This was no simple task! They had to work quickly, last March, to put it all together, through all kinds of issues, learning on the fly.

They make sure that every Sunday morning the minister or speaker is spotlighted, that music videos play, that all the pieces of the service work before the service even begins. One of the team members, along with Cat Dixon and Carrie Helmlinger, log on at 10am, ready to go. They also assist church members unfamiliar with Zoom or those who have a problem that needs troubleshooting. They research Zoom updates and let us know about upgrades so that church members can be informed about what is happening. In addition, the team has been a vital part of getting First Unitarian through the pandemic, allowing us to have congregational meetings on Zoom and to vote for our new minister.

**Please join me in thanking the members of the Zoom Team:**

**Chynna Jedlicka, Stephanie Lewis, Mike McAtee, Sarah Monaghan, Spencer Pereira, Catherine Plumlee, and Kate Wiig**

## Our Religion is not a Zero-Sum Game

By Dave Richardson

On Thursday, May 20, the Atheists, Humanists and Agnostics (AHA) group met on Zoom for the first time in a while. If this had been the revival of a popular Broadway show or the reuniting of a '70s rock band, it might have been labeled something like “THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN OF ...” For many of us who watched that evening, it was just that. The main event was a video of a sermon delivered by Minister Emeritus Ron Knapp in August of 2011 at a UU church in Arizona. The sermon was titled “Wonder Unto Wonder.” As he so often did, Ron invoked the words of some literary giants: Rabindranath Tagore, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Alfred Lord Tennyson and, of course, his muse Walt Whitman. His thesis was the “oneness of the universe” and how it was revealed to us by scientists. This beautiful blending of reason and reverence was truly inspiring. It reminded me why I joined this church. Ron provided a number of takeaways for me that evening.

Fast forward to the next Sunday when a powerful and moving service was conducted by Zr Alex Kapitan, a lay community minister, organizer, educator and editor. Alex spoke of the necessity of widening our circle. Alex’s unique approach to some of the traditional elements of our services was both innovative and inspirational. The call to worship urged us to think of our ancestors, and the guided meditation asked us to look at the faces of the members of the congregation in the gallery view of our Zoom screen and think of their life situations, their joys and their challenges. The theme of Alex’s sermon was “Respect My Truths.” Ze noted that change is needed to adapt to the awakening of our minds and senses to the diversity that strengthens our faith. Alex further connected those insights to how our faith calls us to action, not just appealing to our intellect, but also to our sense of duty. Alex, a transgendered person, spoke with an authentic and compassionate voice. Ze used lessons from their own life to underscore how our own realizations can lead us to fulfill those calls to action. Alex grew up in a Unitarian home. The shared reflections on then and now illustrate the evolution of what is sometimes termed radical hospitality.

Wow! Is it possible to have inspiration overload? Within a period of four days I was given so much to process about so many things: theology, social action, leading a fulfilled life, understanding my place in the cosmos, etc. But it struck me at first glance that these two sermons took two very different and somewhat contradictory perspectives of our faith. But upon further review (as they say nowadays in the world of televised sports) these two sermons and their themes are far more compatible.

This article continues on the next page

## Our Religious is Not a Zero-Sum Game — Continued from previous page

It also brought to mind two very contrasting UU General Assemblies which I attended. In 2007 in Portland, Oregon, I remember hearing excellent speakers (including one of my personal heroes, Daniel Ellsberg of *Pentagon Papers* fame) and participating in stimulating discussions. In one of the plenary sessions, I was somewhat bemused by an hour-long discussion on whether a quotation from Immanuel Kant should be used as an epigraph for a document on a new venture which the UUA was proposing.

Fast forward to 2018 in Kansas City. Attendees were treated to several remarkable addresses on White supremacy and its implications for us as a call to action. I watched as hundreds of people in the audience were standing and rocking from side to side with upraised arms. I thought at first I had been magically transported to an Evangelical Christian pep rally. It certainly was more stimulating than the snooze fest dialogue on Immanuel Kant eleven years earlier.

Since his 2011 sermon, Rev. Knapp has expressed concern over the mission and focus of the denomination. His fears are centered on what he sees as our reluctance to vigorously pursue our fourth principle — “a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” He feels that in our pursuit of inclusivity, social justice and equity (all things which he advocates) we are too timid in our discussions for fear of offending or devaluing some people or some ideologies. He notes “safetyism” and “identity politics” may have taken precedence over the rigor of our search for truth. Meanwhile, other inspiring speakers such as Brittany Packnett in Kansas City and Alex Kapitan in our recent service, have made eloquent pleas for a vigorous new focus on the role of Unitarian Universalism as a force for social reform.

I contend that these are not incompatible tenets. I can be just as inspired by understanding my place in the cosmos as understanding my place in the beloved community. These are not mutually exclusive elements of our faith. Some may see religion as a zero-sum game. These adherents must reject elements that at first blush may seem to be in conflict, and thus crowding out other beliefs. Discomfort may come with change. We are actually strengthened by our realizations that come from understanding ourselves and others. Acceptance is not ambivalence or equivocation, it is merely a more developed sensibility. I am reminded of the line from the fourth stanza of the hymn “Enter, Rejoice and Come In.” — “Don’t be afraid of some change.”

### Upcoming Event: Theme Connection with Rev. Woodbury: Let’s Play!

**Friday, July 16** 1:30pm online and 7pm in person

#### **Theme Connection with Rev. Woodbury: Let’s Play!**

Theme Connection is an occasional gathering which offers the opportunity to connect with the minister and a small group. Rev. Shari will facilitate, continuing our summer Soul Matters theme of Play. The intent of these experiential sessions is to create pathways to deeper connections within ourselves and among the session’s participants, while exploring how the theme speaks to our lives. Each session stands alone and no preparation is required. Age group: 16 and up.

The online group will gather at 1:30pm on Zoom (minimum 3). The in-person group will meet in the Common Room at the church at 7pm (minimum 3, maximum 20).

**Space is limited so please register here for the meeting format you prefer:**

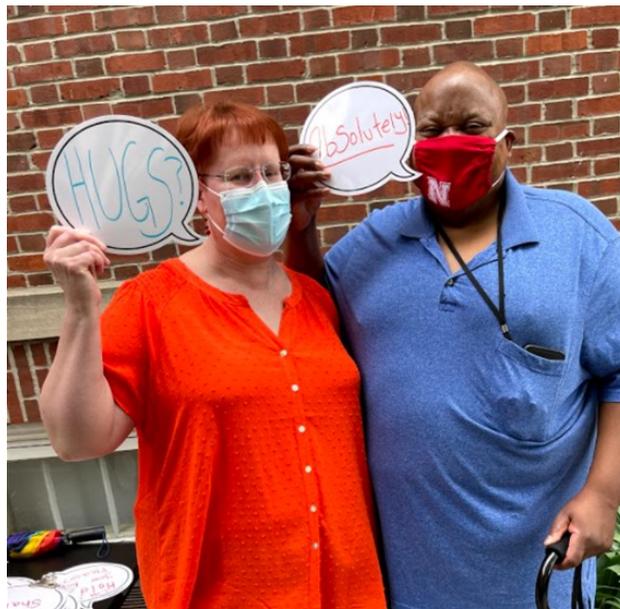
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0D48ADA82EA3F8C52-july>.

Let’s play!

# CommUUnity Caravan Photo Booth



On Sunday, June 6, church friends and members attended our parking lot caravan. This event was special because we invited folks to get out of their cars, and then take photos at our photo booth run by Christina Strong and Carrie Helmberger. Here are some photos that model consent when it comes to others' bubbles of space. See more photos on our website here: [www.firstuomaha.org/caravan](http://www.firstuomaha.org/caravan).



# Outdoor Sunday Service on June 13th



On Sunday, June 13, we held our first outdoor service. This was our first in-person service since the pandemic started in March of 2020. Below are some photos captured by Carrie Helmsberger and Nellie Chenoweth. On the next page, we share some haiku written by you at the service.



# Haiku from Flower Service



Note: some poems were not signed.

Lemon is color  
Beautiful gift, no reason needed  
Strong, sturdy stem

Calm, quiet, stillness.  
Breathing in after the storm  
with my family.

*--Amanda Burton*

Lilies of field  
Glowing in the morning light  
Brighten our summer spirits

Lilac smells so good.  
Beautiful purple blossoms.  
How sad, so short lived.

*--Carrie Helmberger*

Heavy and silent  
Purple petals percolate  
Keeping watch all day

Nice flower basket.  
Cheers summer days & hours.  
Needs sun and water.

*--The Bruns family*

Tiger lily mine  
Rusty red stamen powder  
Stains my white trousers

Lily  
Delicate and soft  
Firm, yet tender, it stands strong  
My orange beauty.

*--Telia Colbert*

Green and red flower  
looking at me in the eye.  
Speaking to my soul.

*--Colin McDonald*

Pretty braids, flowers  
Bound together now nature  
Eye smiles: our rainbow

# Outdoor Sunday Service on June 13th



Below are some more photos captured by Carrie Helmberger and Nellie Chenoweth at our outdoor service.



# The Seven Principles

**Our congregation is part of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). This membership means we're free to discuss any theology, and we affirm and promote these seven principles:**

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

**The living tradition we share draws from many sources:**

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront the powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit
- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions that celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

# COVID Response: Updates

The Reopening Task Force and Ministry Team Council (MTC) have been busy working on guidelines and procedures. We wanted to make sure to keep you up-to-date. A special email about our task force's work was sent out to everyone on our enews list on May 29.

First, there is a COVID response page on our website -- you can go there anytime to see updates and information. To see the COVID Response page on our site, go here: [www.firstuomaha.org/covid](http://www.firstuomaha.org/covid).

## Small Groups Update:

The MTC has approved small groups meeting in the church garden and in the Common Room. **All events (whether outside or inside) at the church must be booked in advance with the church office.** Go to the COVID Response page linked above to see the guidelines for small groups.

## Reminder: Sanctuary Pilgrimages are happening

Registration is open for those who wish to come to the Sanctuary for a 30-minute visit. To view the list of open dates/times and to schedule your visit, please go here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0c4fa4af2fab9-sanctuary>.

**There are special procedures and all visits must be booked on the sign-up page.** If none of the available time slots work for you, please contact the [church office](#).

## Interested in Church Events?

Be sure to sign up for our weekly enews. Delivered to your inbox every week, this email will keep you informed about upcoming church events and activities. Email the church office at [admin@firstuomaha.org](mailto:admin@firstuomaha.org) today to get signed up! Be sure to include your first and last name with your email request.

## New to First Unitarian Church?

At our church, you'll find a vibrant group of religious seekers who have found a common ground where the deepest values of life can be shared. Our growing congregation offers ever-increasing opportunities for life enrichment, spiritual growth, and social justice. Our members and friends are caring, thinking, progressive people of all ages.

Our Membership Coordinator, Carrie Helmberger (pictured to the right), would be happy to meet you at one of our upcoming online visitor classes. Go here for all the details:

[www.firstuomaha.org/visitorclass](http://www.firstuomaha.org/visitorclass)

We look forward to getting to know you better!



**First Unitarian Church of Omaha**

**3114 Harney St.**

**Omaha, NE 68131**

**[www.firstuomaha.org](http://www.firstuomaha.org)**

**402-345-3039**