

SUMMER | 2020

# Chalice Connection

A quarterly publication  
of The First Unitarian  
Church of Omaha

Volume 1 Issue 2



Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

—Margaret Mead



**Mission of First Unitarian Church of Omaha:  
Fostering the Whole Person, Compassion, and Justice**  
[www.firstuomaha.org](http://www.firstuomaha.org)

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

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# Forging New Ground

By Sharon Piehler, Church Board President

## What a strange

and upended world we find ourselves in! Six months ago, we were worried about holiday planning and snowstorms. How insignificant that seems now as we work to protect our lives and restore what has been lost to so many.

We have all seen the profound effect of community and caring as we navigate these uncharted waters. We have been witness to the devastation that comes with lack of community and support. Lack of transportation, healthcare, food and money creates pain and anguish in many ways. Being part of a community, any community, strengthens us physically and emotionally. When we share our hopes and fears we are strengthened. The bonds we create are like many hands holding us afloat in turbulent waters.

We have been fortunate to find ourselves gifted with an amazing community at First Unitarian. A simple idea of “*how can we help each other?*” quickly bloomed into an effort with a multitude of volunteers. We called, drove, wrote, emailed and Zoomed to keep the connections going. We are so very fortunate to have had Rev. Michelle to quickly get us up and running on Zoom. We lost no time in bringing our weekly shared time online for all of us to connect. Our tech “Zoom Helpers” solved problems and taught us how to use Zoom and our tech devices,

maybe even in ways we never would have imagined just a few months ago!

What we once enjoyed at social coffee hour, a pleasant chat over a quick cup of coffee, has become especially important now that we are physically separated. We log on early to weekly services and scroll from page to page to see each other’s faces, faces we cherish and long to see in person. When we log in each week, we demonstrate our commitment to community and each other. We shared this commitment in working through candidating week in such a positive fashion. Our search team spent countless hours finding us the right candidate, we met her online and voted overwhelmingly to call her as our next minister.

Our next steps will include forging a path into a changed future. We will bid goodbye to Rev. Michelle as she moves on to help another congregation as she helped us. We will, in time, determine the best way to reopen our sanctuary in a way that protects all of us. We will open our arms to welcome Rev. Shari Woodbury and her family as the summer draws to a close. We need to assess what our “new normal” will look like and what it means to our beloved church. We have many priorities to balance as we move forward: our welfare and safety, our financial landscape, finding better and easier tech solutions and our future in general.

In the interim, we should take time to think deeply about what sustains us as congregation and what our gratitude looks like. We can continue to stay in touch with each other, support our sister church in their feeding programs, support our stewardship campaign and just be kind to others and ourselves.

We have a great year ahead of us and so much to be grateful for.

In Gratitude,  
Sharon Piehler



# “UU the Vote” is Critical

By Dave Richardson

## For over 200 years, UUs

have led the way in progressive social justice and the promotion of the ideals of democracy. Unitarians were abolitionists, suffragettes, social reformers, education reformers, Civil Rights activists, LGBTQ advocates, environmental activists, migrants rights advocates and so many other ongoing endeavors that have made our communities, our country and the world better places. As Rev. Frederick-Gray notes in the quote to the right of this article, now is the time to put our efforts into implementing our principles in pursuit of participatory democracy.

**“UU the Vote” is a non-partisan faith initiative to engage our neighbors, educate our communities, mobilize voters, and rally around key ballot initiatives.** All through 2020, the UUA is supporting congregations and UU organizations in activating thousands of Unitarian Universalists to mobilize for electoral justice at the local, state and national levels.

The “UU the Vote” manual identifies numerous activities that we can sponsor that are allowable for 501(c) 3 groups which include churches. The main thrust is increasing voter participation and opposing voter suppression.

The 2020 elections are the most critical in our lifetime. This is not just another “issue area”

competing for resources and volunteer time alongside a dozen others. It is a “movement moment.” Organizing efforts are already underway at the national and local levels. It is easy to participate.

There are two ways we can participate. We can sponsor programs within our congregation such as: candidate forums, “get out the vote” efforts or the RE Curriculum on “UU the Vote.” We can also volunteer to help with existing efforts. An example of this is the Diverse Women Lifting Our Voices (DWLOV.) The steering committee members and volunteers are a diverse group in terms of race, gender, etc., including Carol Ramsey from our church. They need volunteers to call voters in the area. The target group is primarily African-American women.

Dave Richardson is leading informational Zoom sessions about UU the Vote. Check your church enews for more information. You can also learn more about this effort by visiting this website: [www.uua.org/justice/vote2020](http://www.uua.org/justice/vote2020).

## A Quote from Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, President of the UUA:

“For Unitarian Universalists, this is faithful, moral action because democracy and the right of all people to have a voice and a vote are at the very heart of our Seven Principles. This work is about the inherent worth and dignity of every person; it is about restoring right relationship with the planet; it is about our commitment to justice and equity for all people. We are called to courageously embody the deepest values of our faith with our hearts, bodies, and spirits while building toward an abundant future in which all are free and flourishing. “



## A Meditation on the Twilight Years

By Donna Tubach-Davis

When COVID-19 hit, I became acutely aware that I now fall into a vulnerable category. I've been aware for some time that I'm growing older, but I never had considered myself to be in a separate group that needed to be shielded or set apart from the main herd. It's a strange feeling and blatantly points out the vulnerability of aging. So what are those of us in that "elderly," "senior citizen," or "twilight years" group to do? And what are you youngsters to do with us?

We, the twilight years folks, have to figure out a way to be thankful for every day we are living actively in relatively good health, and appreciate all the love and support around us. What others are to do is to be grateful for the life we have passed on to you, recognizing we offer a glimpse into your own future. All too soon, you will be us.

Finally, please be tolerant of slowness of mind and limb, but do not pity us or use phrases like, "hello, young woman," which means you're trying to be kind to us for being old. I am not sure just because a person is old they are wise, but there might be a chance that if you really engage with an older person, there may be knowledge they have accumulated over the years that they can share with you, and that knowledge may benefit you.

*Photo below by Lillian McEvoy*



Poem by  
Rev. Dr. Sarah Voss,  
Affiliated Community Minister  
of First Unitarian Church of Omaha

## “Fifteen”

Tomorrow the braces  
my granddaughter has worn  
on her teeth for the past four years  
will finally come off.  
This morning, she slept late,  
then spent the rest of the day  
lounging in white terrycloth pajamas  
with a hood that made her  
look like an over-sized rabbit.  
All afternoon she labored  
on a speech she will give  
in a mock trial in a real courtroom  
with a real judge and a jury  
made up of real attorneys.  
My granddaughter will play  
the defense attorney.  
After supper, she exchanged  
her bunny sleeper  
for a stunning new pant suit  
and spiked heels, carefully  
styled her shoulder-length hair  
then practiced the opening argument  
she will present next Saturday,  
putting perfect polish  
on a presentation  
any professional lawyer  
would be proud to claim.



Learn more about

## Rev. Dr. Sarah Voss

Rev. Sarah is a Unitarian Universalist minister, author, and lecturer who currently is a contract chaplain at Methodist Hospital and a state family mediator. Over the years, she has published extensively about religion and math, including articles on matheology and moral math in publications as varied as *Parabola*, *Journal of Religious Humanism*, *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, and *Theology and Science*. She came to First Unitarian when she was still teaching mathematics, a career which ended not long after she found herself telling her College of St. Mary calculus students how God might be like the definite integral of calculus. She knew then that something was definitely moving her in a new direction. She took math with her into Meadville-Lombard School of Theology in Chicago, and, eventually, the thesis she wrote for her Doctor of Ministry degree became her first published book, *What Number Is God?* (SUNY, 1995). She now identifies herself as a math mystic.

Sarah's very first UU experience was with First Unitarian Church. She remembers how a friend invited her to come on a visitors' Sunday in the 1980s when Rev. Knapp was preaching about the poetry of May Sarton. At the time Sarah was an atheist and Ron's sermon hit just the perfect note with her. She came back the next Sunday and heard him blasting away as he processed in full black robe down the aisle to the pulpit; he spoke about hell, fire, and damnation, and Sarah thought, "Oh, no, I've made a horrid mistake." It was Sunday, April 1st and when Ron reached the front of the sanctuary, he smiled and said "April Fool" and then talked about freedom of religion and our faith tradition. Sarah has been a UU ever since, first as a friend, then as a member, then as a minister, and now as a retired but active community minister. She feels honored and empowered to be formally connected to First Unitarian Church as its first affiliated community minister.

# “We are Better Together: Omaha Sister Churches”

**A story by Cat Dixon about our Sister Church Clair Memorial after an interview with Mark Loscutoff**

The Sister Church initiative was started by Rev. Frank Rivas who wanted to help the members of First U learn about racial biases and work on building a beloved community. It started with some discussions with members of both churches about racism, and a joint picnic. Pastor Portia Cavitt, Clair’s pastor, invited members of First U to join in several programs and social events including a celebration of the pastor’s anniversary with Clair. Our Sister Church has many programs to help disadvantaged members of our community: a food pantry, a twice yearly giveaway of clothing and household items, and tutoring of elementary and junior high students.

After two years, the discussions and social gatherings slowed. Members of First U have continued to donate to the food pantry and the giveaways. We still had three members tutoring students as of March of 2020, but COVID19 came to Omaha and ended the program for the time being. In the future, the Sister Church Team would like to continue social gatherings down the road as we find ways to do that safely in smaller groups.

When Rev. Michelle became our minister two years ago, she brought her own approach to anti-racism efforts. Last year she applied new energy to the sister church relationship, and created the Sister Church Team. The founding members were Rev. Michelle, Mark Loscutoff, Carol Ramsey and Nadine Keith. We recently were happy to receive a new member of the church, and the team, Neva Cozine. We don’t have an official leader, but Mark seems to be the unofficial leader. Our church’s participation with the food pantry has increased since the Sister Church Team was created.

Clair is a distribution center for Food Bank for the Heartland and receives a variety of foods from it, including shelf-stable items like crackers and cereal, frozen meats, and some produce. Grocery stores donate “scratch and dent” items that can’t be sold. The selection is pretty random, and varies greatly. Pastor P. usually requests donations of items to fill in the gaps in the selection, from groups like First U, when she has an idea of what has been provided by the Food Bank. Lately she has requested canned fruit, Jello packs and Spaghetti-O’s.

The pantry is held on the third Saturday of each month. Prep work is done and donations are accepted on the Friday before.

*Article continues on next page*



## Food Pantry Photos

**Special thanks to Katie Zimmer for helping serve at the food pantry this spring**



# “Better Together”:

## Continued from previous page

The pantry is open to anyone. Guests belong to many different racial and ethnic groups. The area hosts a significant population of refugees from Myanmar. Volunteers also get free food when the work is done!

Pre-pandemic, guests would sign-in and walk through Clair’s large common room with a box, selecting items from about 30 tables. Volunteers kept the tables stocked until items ran out. Most items are frozen or shelf-stable, so they can be held for the following month if they do not run out. Since the pandemic, guests stay in their cars and the volunteers deposit pre-loaded boxes into the cars’ trunks.

First U held a fundraiser earlier this year to add to the pantry’s approximately eight refrigerators. Clair wound up receiving a donated fridge, and the funds First U raised were re-assigned to refrigerator maintenance and the purchase of foods that are needed but rarely donated.

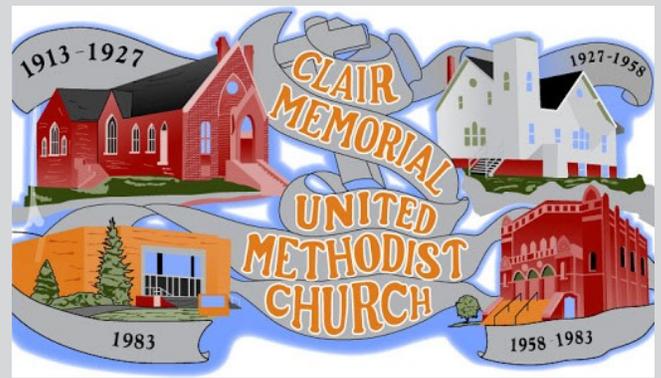
Clair also hosts giveaways that happen in June and December (before Christmas). Church members have donated lightly-worn clothing, new socks and underwear, household items, toys, and books. These giveaways are very much appreciated by the community.

Clair’s church membership is 175. They are predominantly African-American. Clair Memorial United Methodist Church has been an Omaha institution since its founding in 1913. The senior pastor, Rev. Portia Cavitt, has led many social justice efforts in Omaha.

The Clair church website is [www.cmumc.net/](http://www.cmumc.net/), and its Facebook page is: [www.facebook.com/clairmethodistomaha/](https://www.facebook.com/clairmethodistomaha/).

If you would like more information about First Unitarian’s connection with our sister church or want to join in volunteering or donating, please email the Sister Church Team at [sisterchurch@firstuomaha.org](mailto:sisterchurch@firstuomaha.org).

You also visit the Sister Church Team webpage on our church website here: [www.firstuomaha.org/sisterchurch](http://www.firstuomaha.org/sisterchurch).



**Clair Memorial United Methodist Church**  
**5544 Ames Ave.**  
**Omaha, NE**

### Sister Church Community Garden



### Thank You!

The Sister Church Team wants to thank everyone who has donated to the monthly food pantries and to the giveaways. Watch your church enews for information about upcoming ways you can help!

# Reflections from the Garden

## by Carolyn McNamara

In a world where change has become the norm and everything feels out of control, I came to the garden. It too is changing, becoming more beautiful with each season. I am surrounded by pink columbine, yellow buttercups and purple iris. When I take a deep breath, the irises remind me of grape Kool-Aid and childhood. Hiding where they don't think I can see them are tiny orange roses. The yarrow and lilies and peonies will soon join the display and it won't be long before Monarch butterflies return to feast on the milkweed, creating their own beautiful display.

It's peaceful here, even with the traffic racing by, and for me it's a place of strength. I share my bench with my friends, living and dead, those who have passed by, leaving a piece of themselves behind. Some stayed for a short time while others shared a lifetime. I feel their strength in the foundation that surrounds me and their spirit in the steeple soaring above.

During this time of uncertainty, one thing is true. The church is still here. It is waiting for us. Waiting to welcome us into its solid front doors when the time is right to return. Until then, come sit on this bench with me and experience the strength and beauty of this place, this garden, our Home.



### ***Chalice Connection*, a publication of First Unitarian Church of Omaha**

Editor: Catharine Dixon; Proofreaders: Gary Emenitove, Scott Kemper, Lois Norris, and Carolyn McNamara  
Do you have an idea for an article for this new quarterly publication? Do you take photos? Are you interested in interviewing church members or staff? Do you write poetry? Do you have an amazing recipe that people keep asking about? Do you have an important issue that you're passionate about? If so, please submit your items to [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 Communications Policy. More information can be obtained by emailing the church office.

**Next issue coming October 2020. Deadline for submissions 9/1. Theme: Solidarity**

# Saying Thanks & Goodbye to Rev. Michelle

On Sunday, June 21st, Rev. Michelle had her last service with First U. This was followed by a car parade in the church lot. Members and friends gave her cards and gifts. The kids decorated the sidewalks with chalk the day before. It was a different kind of goodbye due to the pandemic. Thank you to everyone who helped make this event happen!



Poem by Carol Pinard Cronin  
Church Member

## “Aging”

Falling apart from the inside out  
Bones and teeth turning to dust  
Papery skin like an old cocoon  
Chrysalis wakes in the light of the moon  
In the place they call “flat water”.

Don't falter.

Memory floats on choppy waves  
Ocean dreams of salt and tears  
Regret reaches up through the undertow  
But the moon whispers soft through the tides  
“Let go.  
Acceptance is not Resignation's daughter”.

Don't fault her.

Pain makes things tight: muscles, jaw, and neck  
Love smooths the lines near the eyes and the soul.  
There's a rose on her ribs and a moth on her hips  
But the song in her heart  
Can't squeeze through her lips  
In the key of life, it's a minor key.

It's still singing.



Photo by Lillian McEvoy

## Vegan Gluten-Free Vanilla Layer Cake Recipe by Sharon Piehler, Church Member

### Wet Ingredients:

1 2/3 cup dairy free milk (I use unsweetened almond milk)  
1 1/2 tsp lemon juice  
1/3 cup unsweetened applesauce  
1 tsp vanilla extract

### Dry Ingredients:

3 1/4 cup almond flour (Not almond meal. Could also sub in coconut flour)  
1 cup potato starch (NOT potato flour)  
1/3 cup cornstarch  
1 1/3 cup organic cane sugar  
1 1/2 tsp baking powder  
1 1/2 tsp baking soda  
1/2 tsp salt

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour two 8 inch pans.
- Add lemon juice to almond milk and let stand for several minutes (until starting to separate)
- Whisk dry ingredients together. Add in wet ingredients and stir until well combined.
- Batter should be thick but able to be poured into pans.
- Bake 30-35 minutes, until sides pull away and knife inserted into center comes out clean.

Cool and remove from pans.

### Frosting:

2 sticks vegan butter ( I used plant butter)  
1/2 tsp vanilla extract  
3 1/2 cups organic powdered sugar

- Beat softened butter with vanilla. Add in powdered sugar until desired consistency for spreading.
- Top with berries , coconut, nuts or leave plain.

Adapted from a recipe by Preppy Kitchen.com

# Chores Suck!

**Written by one UU parent who wishes to remain anonymous**

How many times have we said this? I know I've said it about a million and one times. No matter how many times the dishes are done—people still want to eat EVERY DAY! Often multiple times! (The ingratitude of it all!) No matter how often I fold the laundry (my personal MOST HATED chore), people still want clean clothes daily. No matter how often I wipe down the kitchen, I STILL have to cook more and dirty more items.

Well, you say, you COULD go to all take-out and disposable plates and you would never have to wash dishes again! Don't get me wrong: I've considered it! But it's really expensive and bad for the environment and produces three times the amount of trash. As much as I'd like to, I don't think "I just don't waaaaaannnnnnnaaaaa" is a good enough argument. And it doesn't remove that darn laundry folding chore. (One-time use disposable clothes that are delivered straight to your door...) Why do I think those just wouldn't look cute and are probably a worse environmental drain than daily take-out?

And then there is the blame game! "I did 43.9998% more than ANYONE else in this WHOLE house today like ALWAYS. They did NOTHING all day." Truly I don't know what they have or haven't done. I'm tallying my points easily, because I'm there to see them all, but I don't know if they paid all our bills online when I thought they were gaming. Maybe they cuddled and brushed the dog while I was in the other room. Maybe I didn't find their dishes in the living room because they actively cleaned them up, but I didn't see that. Maybe they were helping a friend through a crisis all day. Who really knows what "they" were all doing.

No. In the end I guess I have to concede that I can't change the chores, I can only change my attitude. That all sounds nice and tidy and dandy until I'm tired or frustrated or cranky AT ALL. And let's face it—that's basically daily. Sadly, just saying it isn't enough. It's a faith PRACTICE.

I do like that things are called faith "practice" because we aren't good at them all at once. You have to PRACTICE the skill of considering chores "Holy Work." I know—roll your eyes. Talk about bull, right? But it's true. Changing how you go about chores can make them holy. Remember, "holy" just means morally or spiritually excellent. It's a sacred act, but that doesn't mean it can't be secular. Chores are faithful, holy work.

Think about it: each time you accomplish a chore you provide a gift to yourself and your family.

You offer up an opportunity to live in a place that is cleaner, tidier, and healthier. You say, "I care so much about you that I want only the best for you and for myself. This is my act of service—offering you a beautiful space to spend your time."

Furthermore, each time you do a chore you eliminate a little stress and negativity. The next time your sister goes to brush her teeth the toothpaste cap will be on and not have sticky goo around it—you just made her morning easier. The next time dad cooks dinner he won't have to try to throw away the cooking trash into an overflowing trashcan while he's trying to get back to the overflowing noodle pot. The next time you try to do homework, you won't have to look under piles and piles of laundry on the table to find your laptop. The next time your brother wants to relax and play games, the basement won't smell like rotting gym socks. The next time your mom is late for work she won't have to freak out that she has no clean clothes. The next time a friend comes for dinner they won't have their first impression of the house be 17 inch grass.

We even honor our home—that place that keeps us safe and warm and comfortable—each time we do a chore. As you put away the dishes, try saying, "Thank you cupboard, for holding the items we need to eat." It sounds cheesy, but go WAY overboard with it. Make it a ridiculous game. Make fun of it. Eventually, you won't be able to help but be grateful for the things you have. Without our bookshelves everything would be in floor piles and open to bugs. Without our dining room table we couldn't chat or have big family meals or play games. Without our couch we couldn't snuggle or throw our legs up under a blanket and watch movies half asleep. Our THINGS have a story. They serve us. Let's thank them.

So, chores will never be fun. They will never be the thing you wake up raring to do. But in most faiths, the holiest acts take sacrifice. Ours is a secular tradition, but we do have some holy things. Our inter-dependent web of existence is holy. Our faith in the people we love is holy. Chores are sacred acts. Chores let us honor the people and places most dear to us. And nothing worth having is simple, but, at least, as you accomplish your chores with pride and gratitude, you can know that you acted as a person of faith today—and that counts for something.

Today, go ridiculously overboard with gratitude. Thank the dishes for holding your quesadilla. Thank the computer mouse for following your every command. Thank your sheets for keeping you cozy. Thank your chores for making you strong and thoughtful. Say out loud how putting away this dish honors and serves your family and what a kind and thoughtful person you are. Go crazy! Basically write the SNL sketch of this kind of thinking. At the end of the day, text the family thread one thing that you are proud of having done well today to support your family.

## 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!



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