

Autumn | 2021

Chalice Connection

A quarterly publication
of The First Unitarian
Church of Omaha

Volume 2 Issue 3



**In this issue,
we focus on
cultivating
relationships**

**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

MINISTER MESSAGE: Wait and See

Rev. Shari Woodbury's sermon shared via Zoom on July 25 is printed here for those who want to read it.

PAGES 2-5

AUCTION ACTION

Don't miss out on this year's Heart & Hand Auction. This year we'll be online and bidding takes place for a full week (Oct 15-22).

PAGE 6

LIBRARY LADY

Linda Parker explores Banned Books Week and shares links to books that have made the library's list this year.

PAGE 9

SIDE WITH LOVE A new team

An important new team has been created and you can get involved.

PAGE 10



Minister's Sermon from 7/25/2021

“Wait and See”

By Rev. Shari Woodbury

Printed here for those who missed it on Zoom and/or want to read it.

I am hyper alert outdoors for the shape of poison ivy. I've taken to hiking with a hat on for fear of ticks and Lyme disease. And these days I see germ and virus vectors everywhere. So I can relate to Scaredy Squirrel.

When the pandemic started, I quietly holed up at home with my pod people and waited for it to pass—maybe this was our equivalent of the squirrel playing dead. When authorities laid out rules for containing the risk to myself and others, I dutifully followed them: scrub hands like a nurse. Check. Wear a mask in public places. Check. Sanitize hands when returning to car from a store. Check. Forgo eating out, singing with others, and vacations. Check.

Having guidelines clearly spelled out made me feel less vulnerable, the world a little less uncertain. Perhaps for the same reason, I share with Scaredy Squirrel a penchant for plans. When our congregation, after many months, at last adopted a Stepwise Reopening Plan, I could feel the tension in my body drain away. Remember the beginning, when we had no plan for how to transition to a new way? Now even though we don't know exactly when or how, we know a transition is coming and we can take deliberate steps to prepare.

I, for one, appreciate Scaredy Squirrel's prudence. Even though it may seem he was a bit over-cautious at times.

Alas, not all creatures have this same capacity for assessing risk. Take painted turtles. When these turtles migrate, they may take the same routes year after year,

traveling convoluted paths to reach a reliable body of water. One study found painted turtles arriving within ten feet of their previous destination, even on a long migration route. Their precision is amazing.

Sadly, when human highways encroach on turtle territory, it can have fatal consequences. Like in north central Iowa, between Clear Lake and Ventura Marsh. A news story tells of a group of kids there, boys of 8-10 years old, who recently set out to help the turtles. Saddened to see numerous turtles, mostly babies, flattened on a street in their town, the kids spent a day plucking the turtles from danger. These young soft-bodied, two-legged creatures sensing a threat scooped up the hard-shelled, four-legged friends, and carried them safely to the other side. They saved upwards of 30 turtles that day and perhaps 200 so far this summer.

This solution for turtles trying to get to the other side of the road offers a reminder for people trying to make it safely to the other side of a pandemic. Some of the same principles apply in both situations. Those of us who can recognize the danger of COVID-19, and do something about it, will be helping to carry the others across to safety, too. For example, by getting the vaccine as soon as I am able, I help everyone else, especially those who are not vaccinated—not only the people who have a hard time taking time off from work to get or recover from the vaccine, but also the children too young to be vaccinated and the cancer survivor whose weakened immune system receives only modest protection from the

Editor's Note

This service, presented on July 25th via Zoom, was our contribution to the UU Summer Worship Co-op involving a dozen Midwest congregations.

The Story for All Ages shared that Sunday was the book *Scaredy Squirrel* by Melanie Watt.

Before you read this sermon, consider watching the Story for All Ages that was recorded by Christina Strong, our Director of Lifespan Religious Education. The sermon refers to this story and is a good place to start.

Go here for the story:
<https://tinyurl.com/bexmyscu>

How to Reach the Minister

Email:
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>

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vaccine. Let us all be like those caring kids, and do our part for everyone.

Before there were cars hurtling over highways in Iowa, endangering turtles, there was the Iowa Sisterhood. These were Unitarian and Universalist women of the frontier in the late 1800s and beyond, who created a web of mutual support. Like the turtles, these women knew their territory well, and they were determined to help their species of religious liberals on the prairie survive. Unitarian men with degrees from Harvard Divinity showed little interest in roughing it on the frontier to help free religion move west. So it was homegrown leaders who adapted to the challenge of planting enlightened religion in these new mission fields.

The Prophetic Sisterhood, as historian Cynthia Grant Tucker called them in her book of that title, faced different conditions, and brought different sensibilities, than their male counterparts back east. They embraced the rigors of frontier ministry with zeal. Religious leaders in 2020, on the other hand, did not have a choice as to the challenges we faced. COVID-19 came to us and we *had* to pivot to a new way of keeping our communities connected. I don't know about you, but when this challenge arrived, I did not relish it. Online worship, parking lot programs, endless Zoom meetings... we didn't sign up for this. Nor did any of us choose to navigate a fluid and inconsistent set of risks and rules as we try to educate our kids, continue our livelihoods, connect with social support systems, or keep working for justice. We didn't sign up for this. But we had to decide how to respond. We have to keep deciding how to respond. Are these new ways of doing church temporary, or are they here to stay? Is it good or bad that we've had to do a bunch of things differently, in church and in life in general? Consider the parable of the Taoist farmer (see story below).

There was once a farmer in ancient China who owned a horse. "You are so lucky!" his neighbors told him, "to have a horse to pull the cart for you."

"Perhaps," the farmer replied, one eyebrow raised. "We shall see."

One day the farmer didn't latch the gate properly and the horse ran away. "Oh no! This is terrible news!" his neighbors cried. "Such terrible misfortune!"

"Is it?" the farmer asked. "We shall see."

A few days later the horse returned, bringing with it six wild horses. "How fantastic! You are so lucky," his neighbors told him. "Now you will be rich!"

"Maybe," the farmer replied. "We shall see."

The following week the farmer's son was breaking-in one of the wild horses when it kicked out and broke his leg. "Oh no!" the neighbors cried. "Such bad luck, all over again!"

"So it would seem," the farmer replied. "We shall see."

The next day soldiers came and conscripted all the able-bodied young men to fight in the war. Because of his injury, the farmer's son was left behind. "You are so lucky!" his neighbors cried.

One eyebrow shot up as the farmer said again, "We shall see."

This story was read by church member Lita Magisana during the Zoom service.

I share this story not to dismiss the impact of the pandemic. The losses have been heartbreaking, the scale great, and the crisis continues. And yet, there's something in the farmer's even-keeled temperament that I can't help but admire. There is wisdom in his judicious wait-and-see attitude, for we *can't* always anticipate what the future consequences of current events will be, or predict what will happen next.

On the (mid)Western frontier, Unitarianism and Universalism faced what seemed to be a great challenge—luring learned men from the East to serve religious liberals on the rough prairie. But hidden in this challenge was a great opportunity: to discover how women could contribute to our tradition as ministers. The sisterhood successfully organized and tended Unitarian churches in Iowa, South Dakota, Illinois, Ohio, Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin and more. What would come from the trailblazing efforts of such ministers? Time would tell. Religious leaders in Omaha were intrigued by these charismatic and practical women. In 1891, Newton Mann, perhaps the most exalted figure in the history of First Unitarian Church of Omaha, invited the founding saint of the sisterhood, Mary Safford, to preach at the dedication of a new addition to the church building.

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This one was not the first house of worship in Omaha to welcome Safford's oratory. As I learned last year from a visiting Jewish historian, she preached at the local synagogue the year before. Its newsletter reported: "If there was any prejudice existing among the members of Congregation Israel as to the introduction of a lady preacher into our Rabbi's pulpit last evening, all such feeling melted away as mist before the sun when that lady, Miss Mary Safford, of the Sioux City Unitarian Church, opened her lips." The newsletter piece concludes, "Her sincere, open countenance, her unaffected simplicity of manner, at once seized the attention of her audience and held them spellbound until the last word of her lecture had died away."

One might imagine praise and plenitude flowing in from Boston to support this vibrant new leadership on the frontier. A few accomplices like fellow Midwesterner Jenkin Lloyd Jones backed the sisters' efforts, but the male establishment back East was disinterested at best. Over several decades, Mary Safford and her network of female colleagues on the plains persisted and flourished. They gave chance after chance for denominational leaders to take them seriously and invest in their success. But the trend did not change. Eager to return to a "manlier" ministry, the Boston brass pushed out the prophetic sisters within a few decades. The Iowa sisterhood did open many hearts and minds on the prairie. The communities they served responded to their gifts. Yet the women were only able to open the door to institutional power a few inches – not enough for many women to get through, or to shift the denomination.

Right here in Omaha, the Unitarian minister Newton Mann may have made waves with his then-groundbreaking preaching on evolution, and even his daring to invite a woman as a guest into his pulpit. But it wasn't until 1996 that this congregation called a woman to serve for the first time as its minister (an interim, temporary minister, at that). The opportunity for women to serve as ordained leaders was passed over for almost a century.

We will do our best
and, with each
stage in our unfolding story,
we will have to wait and
see what comes of it.

We face our own set of challenges in 2021. Will we seize the opportunities they present? Every sector of society is grappling with this now. Asking questions like, what innovations from this period should become mainstays, and what old ways do we need to let go of to make way for them?

I look at our churches and wonder if take-home religious education kits are here to stay... how we will recalibrate smaller gatherings, like committee meetings and affinity groups, to get the right balance of in person and online formats... and here in Omaha, how we can make multi-sensory, multi-media worship the new normal, in this beautiful, historic sanctuary which at the moment is not equipped for it.

I'm not certain what the answer is, but I believe the overarching question is this: Will we help our faith move with the times (or more audaciously, be the leading edge of change)? OR will we allow liberal religion to be frozen in place and time, stuck in doing things "the way we've always done it," limited to a group of people or leaders who are just like the ones who came before? I hope we will proceed with vision and courage and joy. I believe we can do this—we are doing this. Because, what a loss it would be if our liberal religious descendants a century hence were to look back and see our time as an era of wasted opportunity.

Now I say all this but I know it's overwhelming. Big thinkers tell us that a crisis of the scale of this pandemic will reorder society in dramatic ways – speeding up a process of change that, compared to prior eras of human development, was already at a breakneck pace in the postmodern world. So of course this is overwhelming! For individuals and for organizations like churches, there's so much to decide, to rebuild, to create anew. We will do our best and, with each stage in our unfolding story, we will have to wait and see what comes of it.

Over the long pandemic winter, as I holed up with my pod people, we played a lot of ping pong. You might think the same game would get boring after a while, but it's a very dynamic game, especially for well-matched players, which my spouse and I are. Something kind of different happened through this seasonal marathon of ping pong: we would each have long winning streaks. We're still well-matched, so what could account for this?

I think I've figured it out. When I was on a winning streak, it was largely because I was leaning into my strengths. So deliberate in my placement of the ball. Lobbing it from one side and then the other side, making him run all over to hit it back. When he had gone far back from the table to return a long shot, aiming next for that spot just over the net on his right, which he now can't reach quite in time. And plenty of edge shots, barely on the table, the ball sometimes just brushing the edge of the table on its way down to the floor. Those were my particular skills, and I made the most of them.

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My husband had a very different approach. He was constantly experimenting with his technique. Putting a spin on the ball that made it harder to anticipate what it would do once it bounced on my side. Changing up his serve, discovering it was challenging for me to return a particular type of high-velocity serve. Reinventing his strokes every couple of weeks so I had to keep adapting to him. He wanted to keep our long winter ping pong tournament interesting—and he did.

It's true that when we try new things, we open ourselves to failure. But that's okay. As my daughter likes to remind me, this is one of the ways we learn. And what looks like failure may in fact be something else.

The story of the prophetic sisterhood on the prairie reminds me how wise the Taoist farmer is to “wait and see” how a particular turn of events plays out over time. At first these bright women were so successful in serving the needs of religious liberals on the plains. But deprived of institutional support, within a few decades the network all but disappeared, and women's foothold in the ranks of our ordained ministers was lost.

A missed opportunity, absolutely. Yet Mary Safford and all the other women who forged a new way of doing church in the Midwest did make a lasting mark. The prophetic sisterhood helped the denomination stretch theologically. The early women ministers introduced their parishioners to relational forms of ministry that knit families together in hardscrabble places and helped them to thrive. When pushed out of their pulpits, these stubborn pioneers took their leadership and their zeal for reform into the public sphere, paving paths of community ministry that we recognize as important expressions of our values today. And when the stories of this prairie sisterhood were at last rediscovered and told, they inspired future generations of Unitarian Universalist lay people to believe that they could be ministers. I count myself among them. So despite the ways that their efforts were limited by the short-sightedness of others, I see tremendous gifts and successes in the ministries of the Iowa sisterhood.

We too can bring care and courage as we embrace the challenges of our time, and see how far WE can move our faith forward together.

And let's not forget what Scaredy Squirrel learned when he finally—not quite how he meant to—left his tree... his assumptions about what was possible for him were upended. Scaredy Squirrel had talents he hadn't even discovered until this crisis of falling out of his tree – he could fly! Over the last 15 months, we too have found hidden talents... in our ways, we have flown. And so we too can make the choice to change some of our routines. And, even as we pace ourselves and keep using our safety plans, we can enjoy the adventure and feel more alive.

May we embrace the opportunities that lay before us, with courage, and vision, and joy. So may it be. Amen.

Chalice Connection

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Please submit articles, poems, photos: 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 January 2022 issue: 11/30/2021



The Auction Connection

By Sara Switzer

For the past few years I have been a part of the auction team, and even helped chair it for several of those years. Last year was our first year running the auction during a pandemic, and much like this year, having an exclusively online auction poses some unique challenges. With only Zoom and the internet to access each other during this time, it can be difficult to really feel connected with people. I hope that the auction can be a way to keep some connections going.

One of my favorite things the auction has done for me year after year, is teach me about the different people in our church. The types of events, services, or goods people offer can really showcase some wide variety of interests and talents of our church, from musicians, chicken-keepers, jam and jelly makers, tea-lovers, scotch connoisseurs, belly dancers, and so many other things! It's always interesting to find out these sides of people that I might never have seen had it not been for an auction event. As many of you saw last year, the pandemic has unfortunately reduced the number of social events we can have, but the auction team is more than willing to work with you to find a way to make your event idea "pandemic-safe." And with any luck, this time next year we will be able to auction in person.

On that note, I would like to let everyone know that once again, this year's auction is going to be online, and the auction website will be your go-to place for all things auction! There will be a week of online bidding October 15-22, culminating in an all-church Halloween party via Zoom Friday, Oct 22nd with a costume party and prizes. Show your solidarity and support the 2021 Heart & Hand Auction!

For more info go here: <https://charityauction.bid/heartandhand2021>

What is CUUPS (Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans)?

An introduction to CUUPS by Rosharra Owens, church member and current president of the First Unitarian Church's CUUPS group

My first experience with CUUPS began in 2008 in Elgin, IL. I joined a site called meetups.com that helps people find groups with similar interests or religious beliefs. I knew nothing about the UU congregation, but one day I was searching for pagan groups and found CUUPS. I'd been Christian all my life with on and off studies of paganism. I had wanted to find more people like myself. I came across a potluck and meeting hosted by a pagan high priest and priestess. I did my research on the group, of course, to make sure it was legit, and then I attended one of their gatherings. I felt such at home. I went faithfully every month to the gatherings. Even after I moved from Illinois, I still showed up to events whenever I was in town, and I still talk to my old priest and priestess.

Once I moved to Nebraska in 2014, I found First Unitarian Church of Omaha. I had never joined the UU church in Elgin, IL. I was just active in the CUUPS group. I did attend First Unitarian Church services for a while, and later decided I wanted to join CUUPS. Then, I become an official member of First Unitarian Church. I love my church. I love the CUUPS members. I found close friends in the CUUPS group who have always supported me. I don't know what I would do without them.

What are my plans for CUUPS? I plan to continue to do more in the group. I have ideas like taking the CUUPS group on trips to see historical landmarks related to witches and paganism, to go on ghost tours, and to visit religious landmarks. I want to bring the CUUPS group together more than just monthly gatherings. Right now with the pandemic, some of these plans have been pushed to the future. I look forward to social hours which will help us stay connected. Hopefully when things improve, we can meet up face-to-face.

Goals for CUUPS? I want CUUPS to come together naturally as a community—the United States CUUPS groups as well as the UK's. I would like to see the CUUPS groups visiting each other in different states and cities, conducting board meetings where all groups are invited, hosting workshops, and pagan ball parties, etc. I have attended some open CUUPS rituals live on Facebook including one from WY. These virtual gatherings were really awesome. I highly recommend them. While our church is still on Zoom, now is the time to get to know other CUUPS members in other cities and to meet up with each other on Zoom or Facebook. If you need more information about the CUUPS group, email CUUPS@firstuomaha.org. You can also join our CUUPS Facebook group here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/294330060696080>.

A Note about *Third Harmony*

By Kim Dunovan, Church Member

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 or 402-213-6387 if you have questions, or to schedule a screening for your group.

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 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.

“Catch You, Catch Me”

By Suzanne King,
Church Member

Catch you, catch me.
What does it mean to be caught?
Free, vulnerable, authentic and truly me?
Can I share my pains and sorrows and still be caught?
If I expose my wounds, deep and tearfully bleeding,
Will you still catch me?
Will I find safety and comfort with you?
And, will I be willing and able to catch you in return?

Catch you, catch me.
How often we've trusted,
Like a baby falling from a cradle.
Waiting, hoping, yearning for someone to catch us.
Only to, once again, land
Emotionally alone, abandoned
And cradled only by our pain and hopeless despair
Fallen, broken and still longing to be caught.

Catch you, catch me.
Have we chosen another who's trustworthy and reliable,
Pure and unadulterated in their sincerest intent?
Like a divining rod finds water,
Do pure hearts find one another,
Then slowly weave their ethereal threads together,
Forming a hallowed bond
Strengthened by compassion and understanding?

Catch you, catch me.
Is catching you a duty, a prerequisite of friendship?
Or is it a privileged deep connection,
A solemn and unguarded sacred invitation?
Which will you choose, duty or privilege?
And if a time comes when you need to choose differently,
Will I be able to support you?
Will I be able to catch myself as I free you?

Catch you, catch me.
If I need protection and nurturing, will you give it?
Will the emotional risk,
Will the spiritual responsibility,
Will the precious sacred honor,
Of caring for each other in shared harmony
Be greater than our daily stamina for breathing life into it?
Is catching you, catching me stronger than life itself?

Note: This poem was originally published in *The SIGH-LENT Screams of a Woman, an Anthology of Sighs that Lent Themselves to Healing Essays and Poetry*.

“Aging and Understanding” by Dave Richardson, Church Member

A review of Jane Fleishman’s book *The Stonewall Generation: LGBTQ Elders on Sex, Activism, and Aging*

Approximately 20 years ago, I worked at a Summer Debate Institute for High School Students at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. The opening staff meeting was led by the late Dr. Scott Deatherage, the debate coach of the prestigious NU Wildcat Debate Team. At that meeting, one of the summer staff members asked Dr. Deatherage what courses he would be teaching in the fall semester. Scott said he was really looking forward to teaching a two-part upper level course titled “The Rhetoric of the Gay Liberation Movement Pre-Stonewall” and the companion Spring course appropriately titled “The Rhetoric of the Gay Liberation Movement Post-Stonewall.”

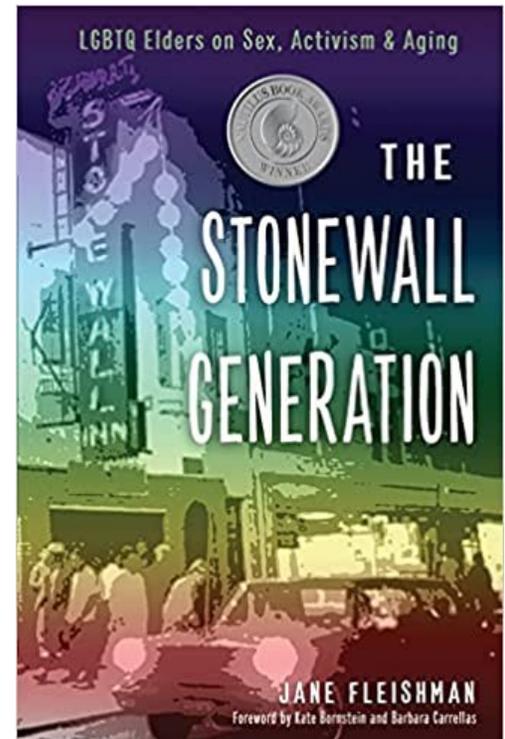
To my surprise, the staff member who had asked the original query said, “What is Stonewall?” It should be mentioned, the staff member was by no means an ignorant individual. He held an MA and was a highly successful high school debate coach from the West Coast. Without condescension, Scott explained about the Stonewall Riots in 1969 and the consequences. Scott (an openly gay man) assured the questioner that he was not the first to ask that question. At first, I was embarrassed by the question. Upon later reflection, I realized the problem was not limited to a few people—it lies in the mainstream media and our education system. Why do we all know about Woodstock, the moon landing, the Manson Family murders, and any number of other events in 1969, yet there are many who are unaware of the Stonewall riots that occurred during this tumultuous year in our history? This book explains why Stonewall was a seminal event. Each chapter features an individual narrative of a person who was present at the Stonewall Riots or whose life was dramatically changed by the riots and their consequences.

The book is superbly written by a person who lived through many of the struggles of the Gay Rights movement. Jane Fleishman is a certified sexuality educator, researcher, and writer with more than forty years of experience. She also contributed to *Our Whole Lives: Older Adults*, the final piece in the pioneering lifespan sexuality education curricula. It is noteworthy that the book was published by Skinner House, a publishing arm of the UUA. Fleishman’s original intent was to study only those who were actually at the Stonewall Inn resistance riots. She soon discovered many were dead or were hard to find. Thus, she broadened the focus to include older LGBTQ people whose lives were directly affected by Stonewall and the Gay Liberation movement of the ‘70s, ‘80s and ‘90s. *The Stonewall Generation* is a gem of a book, with interviews that illuminate different aspects of LGBTQ life in the United States, and how aging intersects with identity, activism, and sex.

Her narratives include the personal stories of Gays, Lesbians, and other sexualities, including transgendered individuals, drag queens, and sex workers of a variety of sexualities. The struggles of these older members of the LGBTQ community make for very compelling stories. Some were closeted for most of their lives and some have been “out” for years. Several campaigned actively for LGBT+ equality, Gay Pride activism and AIDS awareness. Others participated in the demonstrations for Gay Rights after the murder of Harvey Milk and more recently for same sex marriage. Others of the Stonewall generation were homeless, incarcerated, or placed in mental hospitals because they were LGBT+. Many were educators, social workers, or health care providers who were victims of discrimination of many types throughout their lives.

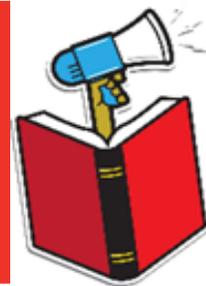
The Stonewall Generation is living history—from a few who were in the Stonewall Inn Bar that evening to those who weren’t even aware of it. This is essential reading for straight and gay folks. The book gives voice and visibility to people who have been largely ignored by our society. For straight readers like me, the insights were numerous especially coming from the viewpoint of those who lived it. It’s time to listen to them. I think the most important takeaway from this book for me is that “coming out” is not a single event, rather it is an ongoing process.

This book and many others are available from our church library which is curated by our own “library lady” Linda Parker. Contact her for access to our collection at lparkerlib@gmail.com or call the church office.



Read! Read! Read!

By Linda Parker, Archives and Library Leader



BANNED BOOKS WEEK READING CHALLENGE

Every year the American Library Association (ALA) urges libraries to sponsor informational programs (known as Banned Book Week) about the harms of censorship. These programs are always scheduled for the last week of September. The dates for 2021 are September 26 through October 2. The focus is on the efforts across our country to remove or restrict access to books. The link for the **Banned Books Website** of the American Library Association is <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/bannedbooksweek/ideasandresources/activity>. This website suggests how individuals can support free expression and intellectual freedom!

The Omaha Public Library has issued a challenge to read a banned book. OPL has posted a list of books which have been frequently challenged in 2021. Here is the link:

<https://omahalibrary.org/blogs/post/2021-reading-challenge-read-a-book-that-has-been-banned-or-frequently-challenged/>

A recent addition to the list was [*Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You*](#) by Jason Reynolds, which was almost removed from the curriculum in Round Rock, Texas after one parent filed a complaint against the book. "Stamped" is a highly accessible history of racism and Black history in America. This book is available in an edition for children as well as the original written for adults. I want to read this book as background for the October 7th Atheists, Humanists, Agnostics (AHA) Zoom meeting to discuss the future of the UUA.

Are you curious about which titles have been challenged in schools, public libraries, and university libraries? ALA has published annual lists from 2001 to 2020 of the most frequently challenged books for that year. As I looked at the 2020 list, I realized that I have read three with a fourth one on my to-be-read shelf. Here is the link to the Top 10 Lists:

<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10>

Read! Read! Read!
Linda Parker
Library Lady

Joys and Concerns



We continue to work on weaving connections in worship. Each Sunday, you'll have the chance to share Joys & Concerns in the chat during the service. Another option is to submit your joy or concern on the website. Whether it's via chat or submission on the website, the worship leader will briefly lift up personal joys and concerns from the congregation during worship. These joys and concerns are then shared in the weekly email "In the Glow of the Chalice" emailed to church members by Carrie Helmberger, Membership Coordinator.

Go here to submit your joy or concern: www.firstuomaha.org/joysandconcerns.

A new team with an important mission:

Side with Love

Next Meeting: Wednesday, October 6, 6:30pm

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/93009580832>

The Ministry Team Council recently approved formation of Side with Love, a social justice team with a mission to create more pathways for members to live our values in the broader community. Mindful of our status as a Welcoming Congregation, and the overwhelming congregational vote in support of Black Lives Matter, Side with Love is initially focusing on anti-racism and equity for LGBTQIA+ people, with a deep commitment to hold ourselves accountable to the marginalized communities who are most adversely affected by the current systems we are working to change.

Our Side with Love team is part of a denomination-wide Side with Love campaign to organize and elevate the voice of UUs across the country to build more just, democratic and sustainable communities. (Go here to learn more about the national campaign <https://sidewithlove.org>.) The new Side with Love team at First Unitarian intends to be a vehicle to promote awareness, as well as offering a mix of study and action, around the issues our church community is most passionate about. Action may include letter writing, lobbying, testifying at legislative hearings and participating in public demonstrations.

First Unitarian's 501(c)(3) status allows member participation in non-partisan, issue-related activities, as long as we don't engage in any type of political campaigning for candidates. In addition, the Side with Love Team will take care and be clear not to speak about any issue in the name of First Unitarian Church, unless the congregation has voted to take a public stand in accordance with our church bylaws.

The Side with Love team wants to build on the success of last year's First Unitarian UUtheVote project that increased participation in the democratic process, worked with several nonpartisan "get out the vote" groups and received training on how to participate in these activities as a 501(c)(3) organization. There is more work to do! This quote from the national campaign captures the spirit of our new Side with Love team: "Our faith calls us to act in solidarity, understanding that interdependence means 'None of us are free until all of us are free.'" Our lives and future are bound together, and together is how we move forward toward living out our faith in a just and loving world."



Three Sentences

By Kim Dunovan, Church Member

Two weeks after the 9/11 attacks, Thich Nhat Hanh gave an address at Riverside Church in New York City on “Embracing Anger.” I still vividly remember my own anger, and flying the American flag for the very first time; looking to the “shock and awe” of our military to assuage my own and the country’s collective pain and suffering.

Thich Nhat Hanh begins that evening in September, 2001, by saying, “My dear friends, I would like to tell you how I practice when I get angry. During the war in Vietnam, there was a lot of injustice, and many thousands, including friends of mine, many disciples of mine, were killed. I got very angry.” He expounds on his deep anger about the war and the peacemaking steps he began in 1966 that led to his exile from Vietnam for the next 40 years.

Thich Nhat Hanh then offers three sentences to speak when one is angry. He calls them the language of love. They are:

“I suffer and I want you to know.”

“I am doing my best.”

“Please help.”

For several years, I’ve been studying and doing my best to practice Nonviolent Communication; a framework for living with more compassion and connection to the universal feelings and needs all humans have in common. I began a mindfulness practice around the same time, with no initial appreciation for the supportive interplay between the two.

Anger is a strong emotion. It’s very challenging to stay compassionately connected, and in relationship with the target of our anger. My own understanding of how to practice with Thich Nhat Hanh’s language of love is deeply informed by the fundamental principles of Nonviolent Communication.

“I suffer and I want you to know.” Be honest about why I’m hurting, without resorting to shaming and blaming the other person. Be as neutral and descriptive as possible about what I think happened, what I’m feeling, and what I’m wanting more of without a lot of my own subjective interpretations.

“I am doing my best.” Before speaking, turn inward. First, get curious about the source and nature of my anger, with empathy for myself and the other person. Am I misunderstanding what happened? What might be going on for the other person? And refrain from “acting angry” with words or actions intended to harm and cause pain.

“Please help.” Resist the urge to create separation. Instead lean in, move closer, stay connected and ask if they’re willing to work toward some mutual understanding by sharing what’s most alive in them and listening to what matters most to me.

In his address, Thich Nhat Hanh offered the following advice and hope that the United States would respond to the 9/11 attacks in this language of love:

“I believe very strongly that the American people have a lot of wisdom and compassion within themselves. I want you to be your best when you begin to act, for the sake of America and for the sake of the world. With lucidity, with understanding and compassion, you will turn to the people who have caused a lot of damage and suffering to you and ask them a lot of questions.”

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"We do not understand enough of your suffering, could you tell us? We have not done anything to you, we have not tried to destroy you, to discriminate against you, and we do not understand why you have done this to us. There must be a lot of suffering within you. We want to listen to you. We may be able to help you. And together we can help build peace in the world." And if you are solid, if you are compassionate when you make this statement, they will tell you about their suffering."

I only recently came across this Thich Nhat Hanh address, in the midst of reading current news stories about the fear and violence accompanying our final troop withdrawal, after nearly two decades in Afghanistan. Alive, but mostly numb to the death and suffering caused by Vietnam and these post 9/11 American wars, Thich Nhat Hahn's anger woke me up a bit. And I'm imagining what the world might now be like if the United States had followed his advice, taking steps after 9/11 to cultivate relationship, not war, with those who harmed us.

2021 KIOS BUNDLED DONATIONS

This year, KIOS bundled contributions totaled \$2,345 for which First Unitarian Church will be acknowledged as underwriter a total of 109 times on various news and entertainment broadcasts. Thank you to these members and friends who have been so generous in their support:

Jaime Alexander - Kim & Brian Callaghan - Sharon Conlon & Jack Heidel - Beth Conover & Steve Raybine
Deb & Tim Duggan - Kim Dunovan & Jerre Tritsch - John & Kay Lynn Goldner - Linda Hess
Walt Jesteadt & Donna Neff - Suzanne King - Ron & Anne Knapp - Andrea Kuhn - Mark Loscutoff
Harriet Major - Carolyn McNamara & John Wagner - Lois Norris - Dave Richardson
Jessie & Ben Stallings - Diane Withem - Shari Woodbury

Share the Plate Beneficiary for October 2021

For the month of October, our share the plate beneficiary is the Sister Church Clair Cares Food Pantry. Each month, our sister church Clair Memorial United Methodist, holds a food pantry. Many of our members and friends donate food to this pantry monthly. Often, our members and friends volunteer at the food pantry. If you're interested in making a monetary donation to the food pantry, please go here: <https://clairumc.churchcenter.com/giving>. Choose the option "Clair Cares Food Pantry."

To learn more about the food pantry, and to find out what food items are needed this month, please go to: www.firstuomaha.org/sisterchurch.

Learn more about the Clair Church community garden here in Omaha by watching this video: <https://vimeo.com/487056499/2916fc91ea>.

If you have questions about our Sister Church or the food pantry, please email the Sister Church Team at sisterchurch@firstuomaha.org.

Recreation, ReUUnion, & RitUUal

On Sunday, September 19, we invited members and friends to attend special gatherings at four local parks to help celebrate our Water In-Gathering service. Thank you to all our hosts and volunteers who made these events so wonderful. Below are a few photos we received. If you took photos at your event, please send them to the church office.



Recreation, ReUUnion, & RitUUal



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: Update 9/15

Our Reopening Task Force recently revised the [Stepwise Reopening Plan](#) and several other policies. You can find our current risk level and most up-to-date policies here: www.firstuomaha.org/covid

Small groups may once again meet in the building, with well-fitting masks and social distancing. Group leaders should reserve space through the church office and follow the updated [Procedures for Small Groups Entering the Building](#) (or the updated policy about [Outdoor Gatherings policy](#) if gathering outside).

Wondering why our policies have changed?

Our Reopening Task Force considered the proven effectiveness of masking and distancing at mitigating the spread of COVID-19, anticipated airflow improvements in the sanctuary, and rising vaccinations (with likely a higher-than-average rate among our members). We now have plans in place for the logistics of reopening for worship. And our Multi-Channel Church Task Force is ready to begin experimenting with multi-channel (aka hybrid) worship. This means that the online option will still be available for those more at risk or more risk averse. Church leaders are also mindful of the readiness of many of our members and core Sunday staff to return, safe options we're offering to children and families, and the importance of in-person connection opportunities to the mental and emotional health of our members and community.

This fall, we ask everyone to help us create a culture of masking, including wearing masks properly, especially indoors or with children. We can also all work together to practice consent. This means asking others about their comfort level before offering a hug or a handshake. And any small groups that want to consider unmasking (currently, outdoors only, and not children) should consult all group members beforehand, to determine what is comfortable for participants. Let's all continue to practice good handwashing habits and make liberal use of hand sanitizer, too. By carrying on all of these practices, we can connect with each other and keep one another safe.

You can see Rev. Shari's whole message that was emailed out to the congregation on September 15th here:

<https://mailchi.mp/firstuomaha/regrouping-and-reopening>

If you need a paper copy of the email or our COVID policies, please call 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 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

We look forward to getting to know you better!



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