

# THE AMHERST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST NEWSLETTER

121 North Pleasant Street, P.O. Box 502, Amherst Massachusetts 01004

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**



**February 2024**

**Sabbatical: A time for renewal  
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**Reclaim Our Vote is back!  
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**Part 2 of "Transylvania — Cradle of  
Unitarianism"  
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## Important Information

### **STREET ADDRESS:**

121 North Pleasant Street, Amherst, MA 01002

### **MAILING ADDRESS:**

P.O. Box 502, Amherst, MA 01004-0502

*The following staff can be reached by email or by calling the office and leaving a message: 413-253-2848*

**MINISTER: The Reverend Rachael Hayes**

[revrachael@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:revrachael@uusocietyamherst.org)

**CONGREGATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR:**

Lea Douville [office@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:office@uusocietyamherst.org)

**Office Hours: Tuesday - Friday 11:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.**

**DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:**

Andrew Coate [dre@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:dre@uusocietyamherst.org)

**Office Hours: Wednesday 9:30 A.M. - 4:30 P.M.,**

**Sunday 10:00 - Noon, evenings as requested**

**YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT COORDINATOR:**

Eden Richardson [youthandya@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:youthandya@uusocietyamherst.org)

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC:**

Brenda Miller [music@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:music@uusocietyamherst.org)

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES:**

[board@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:board@uusocietyamherst.org)

[link to board minutes](#)

**Co-Presidents:**

Jeff Clark and John Gerber

**Clerk:**

Ashley Carter

**Treasurer:**

Eric Murphy

**Members At Large:**

Linda Callahan

Sue Kelly

Deeya Pavelle

## NEWSLETTER

With huge appreciation and love for John Foster, our newsletter's longtime Production Editor.

Deadline for submissions: 20th of each month. Email them to Copy Editor Janis Gray (contact Lea in the office if you need her email address).

Please understand we cannot cut and paste PDF files into the newsletter, so submissions should either be Word documents, rich text files or written in the body of the email. Submissions may be edited to save space or to maintain a consistent style.

Thank you!

Printed on recycled paper



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## Schedule of Services

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**We encourage you to attend our Sunday services in person.** *As of this writing*, masks are again required, given a recent rise decline in COVID numbers in our area.\* You may also attend online. Click <https://bit.ly/463gaOt> Meeting ID: 998 5370 0822 PW: 599092 Or call in +1 646 876 9923 and enter Meeting ID: 998 5370 0822.

\*The UUSA Board of Trustees has voted unanimously to change the COVID-19 Building Use Policy to “mask optional” in most of the sanctuary when the risk level is low. A “mask required” area will be maintained on the balcony, next to the windows. Masks are always welcome. Our new policy depends on weekly tracking of wastewater using BioBot Analytics COVID-19 website. If wastewater tests remain below 1000 copies/mL in Hampshire County, the UUSA will remain in Low or Green risk level and continue as “mask optional.” If the risk level increases above that level, we will move to “mask required” or more stringent limits, if necessary. For details, please see the revised policy here: [https://www.uusocietyamherst.org/covid\\_policy/](https://www.uusocietyamherst.org/covid_policy/)

**Sunday, February 4, 10:30 A.M. – *Delight***  
**Robin Livingston**

**Sunday, February 11, 10:30 A.M. – *From the Strength of This Circle***  
**The Rev. Rachael Hayes**

**Sunday, February 18, 10:30 A.M. – *Equity: The Right to Flourish***  
**The Rev. Rachael Hayes**

**Sunday, February 25, 10:30 A.M. – *Sharing What We Can***  
**The Rev. Rachael Hayes**



### Check out the UUSA YouTube Channel!

Original content from our Sunday services are now uploaded to our website, [uusocietyamherst.org](https://uusocietyamherst.org), with optional closed captioning! To view them, click [here](#) — and don't forget to SUBSCRIBE!

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## Dedicated Offerings

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From September to June, our Society donates each month to a dedicated offering recipient and splits 50/50 every Sunday's offering plate with the recipient organization. We will report in a future newsletter what we raised in December for **Etta International, Empowerment through the Arts**, and in January for **Reproductive Equity Now**. In September we raised \$1,000 for **UUA Disaster Relief Fund** to support the Montpelier VT UU congregation, which suffered a great loss when the Connecticut river flooded its building; in October \$1,175 for **Maui Strong** to support victims of the wildfires which devastated Lahaina in western Maui, Hawa; and in November \$850 for the **Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC)**,

The Dedicated Offerings for the month of February are for [Healing Across the Divides](#), an organization committed to improving the health of marginalized Israelis and *all* Palestinians via community-based interventions. Its mission is accomplished by funding local community groups, helping to increase their effectiveness. In its 16 years, the organization has measurably impacted the lives of more than 200,000 marginalized Israelis and Palestinians.

[Healing Across the Divides](#) brings together local community groups to exchange ideas and generate interest in working together. And this approach to community collaboration, as well as emphasis on community-based interventions, represents a path to peace building. Locally based, it is the only nonprofit organization that provides health-related funding and technical assistance to both Palestinian and Israeli communities, as well as the only one to foster this type of health collaboration. Through community-based interventions

addressing health, our local partners are serving as peace builders, and ultimately, as healers.

The Dedicated Offering Committee selects non-profit organizations that our Society will support with donations from our Sunday collections. We solicit UUSA's members for names of organizations through a form which is available in the office and on-line at <https://forms.gle.hypMGzMJHgeAVf26>. A representative of the chosen organization is asked to speak about it on the first Sunday of the month. We welcome new members. If you are interested in learning more or joining DOC, please contact **Anne Perkins, Mary Beth Seminario, Linda Callahan, Carolyn Holstein, Linda Honan** or **Brenda Bushouse**.

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### **Feedback Wanted by the Board of Trustees**

The UUSA Board of Trustees would like to hear from you about your thoughts on the leadership, management, and general governance of the UUSA. Governance is a shared responsibility of the Minister, the Board of Trustees, and the many committees, ministries, groups, circles, and teams of the congregation. Please share your thoughts and suggestions using this "[\*digital suggestion box\*](#)" (an email).

Our Congregational Administrator will forward your feedback to the Minister, Board of Trustees, and/or committee leader, as appropriate. Members of the Board will also be available during the coffee hour after the services to hear your thoughts. In addition, you are invited to speak directly to the Board at our next meeting. To be included on the board meeting agenda, please contact either of the co-presidents. We'd like to hear from you!

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### **Our Caring Team**

Please let Caring Team leaders **Fran Plumer** or **Catharine Porter** know if you or someone you know would like a phone call or visit, perhaps a ride or a meal. Our mission is to see that no one goes unnoticed and everyone in our community gets the help they need. Other team members are **Charlie Atwood, Pete Rogers, Carol Johnson, Rob Fuderich, Rev. Rachael Hayes, Jeanne Ballantine, Carolyn Cave, Mary Latham, Linda Callahan, Sophie Hermann, Lynn Sussman, Kate Dahlstedt, Gordon Wyse, Lauren Croce, Karen Mack**.

### ***A letter from Rev. Rachael to the UUSA Community***

Dear UUSA,

When you called me as your minister in 2019, you included a sabbatical period in my letter of agreement "for study, education, writing, meditation, and other forms of professional, religious, spiritual, or personal growth." Starting in about 2021, as ministers began to understand that the stress of the pandemic on congregations and their leaders would require a more complex recovery than we had originally understood, my colleagues came to realize the value of taking sabbatical leave as soon as possible, for the health of our ministries and congregations as well as our personal wellbeing.

My hope is that in the course of my sabbatical I will recover the energy and clarity I spent on getting us through the pandemic. My sabbatical plan is to reconnect my mind with my body—for years I felt like a head in a Zoom square! I'll tell you more about what that turns out to be when I return, but it feels important that this be a time of renewal and truly learning to rest again rather than one of accomplishment or achievement.

In 2020, the ways we ran our congregation changed, accelerating the trend toward professionalism in congregations that has been taking place for decades. As member volunteers have less capacity to do the work of the congregation than in previous decades, the minister and staff take on more of those tasks. This was already taking place before the pandemic began, but the switch to all-Zoom services and social distancing changed everything. The staff and I, along with a small number of dedicated lay leaders, took on the bulk of the work of the congregation. During the sabbatical, the congregation has the opportunity to check in with one another and truly own the direction of the congregation.

You're in good hands during the sabbatical because they're your hands. UUSA has a long tradition of strong lay leadership.

Sunday Services will be overseen by **Alyson Bull** and **Robin Livingston** of our Worship Collaborative. A cohort of members (**Polly Peterson, Jennie Mack, Alyson Bull, Anne Louise White, Robin Livingston, and Kate Dahlstedt**) are already hard at work at crafting services based on new and classic stories. Our Director of Religious Education **Andrew Coate** will lead several services, including a Beltane service and RE Milestones service. Our Music Director **Brenda Miller** and the **UUSA choir** will lead a musical service. Our **Green Sanctuary Committee** has invited Rev. Jo Murphy of UU Mass Action to speak. Special guest speaker Zr. Alex Kapitan of the Radical Copyeditor blog and Transforming Hearts Collective will join us for a Pride service in June.

For pastoral care and needs, you can reach out to our Caring Team, led by **Fran Plumer** and **Catharine Porter**, as well as DRE **Andrew Coate**. **Rev. Janet Bush** of Northampton is also available for pastoral emergencies.

The Board of Trustees will hold the practical details of the sabbatical, with Co-President **Jeff Clark** as coordinator. Congregational Administrator **Lea Douville** and member **Mary Herman** will support as needed. If you have a question about the sabbatical during the sabbatical, talk to Jeff!

The Committee on Shared Ministries (**Mary Ann Gundersen, Bo Mack, and Jessica Murphy**) are leading a reflection process on the congregation's mission and purpose. I am excited to return from sabbatical to hear what the congregation has discerned with their guidance.

At the same time, the Board of Trustees will continue their thoughtful and collaborative governance and the committees, ministries, circles, and teams of the congregation will continue in their excellent work.

The sabbatical will begin on April 1 and last through the end of our program year in June. After my customary July vacation and study leave, I will be back in the office at the beginning of August and back in the pulpit for Blessing of the Backpacks on August 25. During the sabbatical, I hope you enjoy the beautiful sermons that our Story Sermon cohort is preparing, continue to welcome newcomers and connect them with the life of our congregation, and nurture the connections that make UUSA a wonderful community. Play, have fun, and be present to one another. Let this time of renewal be a time of renewed connections for you as well.

Between now and March, I invite you to reach out for a meeting with me if you would like to talk, for whatever reason! If you would like my input on something you are planning during my time away, or if we are planning something together for the fall, let's check in now. You can make meetings on my calendar by selecting a time at <https://calendly.com/revrachael>. If none of the available time slots work for you, please email me and we'll find a time together.

Of course, it is a justice issue that all work is valuable and all people deserve the support of sabbatical time. I am so grateful that you have offered this time to me.

In faith,

Rev. Rachael

[revrachael@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:revrachael@uusocietyamherst.org)

### *A letter from Jeff Clark on behalf of the Board to the UUSA Community*

Dear UUSA,

Every religious institution faced a huge challenge during the Covid pandemic. UUSA was no exception.

Now that in-person services, social gatherings and community programs have returned to our congregation, we should not forget the effort it took for us to rise to the challenge and keep the light on.

For our **Rev. Rachael Hayes**, facing this challenge in her first full year of ministry turned a smooth onboarding experience into an obstacle course. And, one that she handled with grace. New hopes and aspirations were temporarily set aside for emergency planning and implementation.

Last Spring, the Board of Trustees approved her sabbatical for this coming April through June. It will be a time of "study, education, writing, meditation and other forms of professional, religious, spiritual or personal growth" as noted in her contract. See a recent UUA blog titled, "[Sabbaticals Are Needed Now More Than Ever.](#)"

I look forward to working with the Board of Trustees to guide the congregation through this period. We will be working closely with the Worship Collaborative, the Director of Religious Education, the Committee on



Shared Ministries, and Lea as liaisons to support their work.

Please read Rev. Rachael's communication on her intentions and our plans to support the congregation during her brief sabbatical.

For more background on the sabbatical plans, see our [sabbatical web page](#).

In community,

Jeff Clark, Co-president of the UUSA Board of Trustees

[jjclark978@gmail.com](mailto:jjclark978@gmail.com)

[board@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:board@uusocietyamherst.org)

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## Social Events

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**Second Friday Fun! is on Friday, February 9.** Those who attended in January had lots of fun! [RSVP by EOD 2/7](#) (we need an RSVP to get the right amount of pizza!). Thanks!

**Two concerts** scheduled for March: **Saturday, March 2**, [Anne Louise and friends](#) and **Saturday, March 30**, Big Yellow Wooly Trousers. Doors open at 6:30; concert starts at 7:00 P.M.

**Women's Circle** 2nd and 4th Thursdays The 2nd Thursday gathering is in person at the UUSA (Conference Room) and the 4th is on Zoom. This is an informal social group - no RSVP needed (*?s: contact Janis Gray or Lea*)

**Men's Breakfast** Wednesday mornings @ 7:00 A.M. (Stables Restaurant, Hadley). This in an informal social group—no need to RVSP, just show up! (*?s: contact Pete Rogers*)

**Free Community Breakfast** in UUSA Social Hall Wednesday mornings 8:00—10:10 A.M. Co-sponsored with Craig's Doors. *Volunteers welcome (?s: contact Sophie Rogers) or just come to eat and chat.*

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## Co-President's Letter

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The following is an abridged version of an essay read by UUSA participants in the 2023 UUA Common Read of Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg's book, *On Repentance and Repair: Making Amends in An Unapologetic World*.

According to the UUA, the religious movement that evolved into the Unitarian and Universalist denominations in North America began with the Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline signed by English settlers in 1649. This platform described a system of church self-governance free from hierarchical control by a central authority that continues to guide congregational churches of New England (including Unitarian Universalists congregations) to this day. The Cambridge Platform affirmed that government should punish idolatry, blasphemy, heresy, and “the venting of corrupt and pernicious opinions.” This endorsement from religious leaders gave the colonial government a free hand to mistreat indigenous people who were generally viewed as “corrupt and pernicious.”

While English settlers initially depended on good relationships with Native peoples, tension and hostilities were common. Although congregationalist churches were guided by a covenant that required mutual responsibility to other members of the congregation, what was clear from the beginning was that Native peoples were not considered part of the covenant. There was little trust between the settlers and even the most compliant “Praying Indians” who were said to have experienced “a spiritual transformation from heathenism toward civilization that made them more like Englishmen.”

The general narrative espoused from church pulpits in New England presented Native peoples as “permanently barbaric and cut off from God's salvation.” As late as 1936, the president of the American Universalist Association, the Reverend Samuel A. Eliot II, supported the work of Indian boarding schools to “civilize and assimilate” Indian youth. While colonial militia, European settlers, and the British and later American military were culpable in the erasure and oppression of Native peoples of New England, our own religious ancestors must also bear some of the responsibility for “America's original sin.”

UU Minister, the Reverend Jill Cowie, in a November 2017 sermon, stated that “...the intellectual, moral, and spiritual justification for European colonization and slavery” was rooted in the teachings of the Christian

church and were “...used by our Protestant ancestors of the Mass Bay Colony and the Virginia colony to justify the subjugation of indigenous people in this country... a conquest that led to multiple broken treaties, the trail of tears, the formation of over 300 reservations, mandatory boarding schools, cultural obliteration, and genocide.”

The first step in repentance and repair according to Rabbi Ruttenberg is to “name and own” the harm that was done. Toward this end, delegates at the 2020 General Assembly of the UUA boldly stated that:

...the Pilgrims’ invasion of the Wampanoag people led to the enslavement of Indigenous peoples on the East Coast and the removal of and genocide against Indigenous peoples across the continent.

... many Unitarian Universalist congregations uncritically trace their origins to the Pilgrims’ “Free Church” tradition – a mythos that sanctifies white supremacy and depends upon erasure of Indigenous peoples.

The next step, even before any apology and repair work begins, is to “start to change and stop causing harm.” Perhaps it's time for the UUSA to consider removing the name of a white supremacist from the name of our congregation. To “stop causing harm”, we might “lose the A” from the UUSA. Further steps in repentance and repair are necessary of course, but this would be a good beginning. The next steps might include partnering with other local congregations as part of the ION project, [400 Years: Truth & Healing for the Next Seven Generations](#). While some of us may not want to “look back” at the harms done by our religious ancestors, the work of repentance and repair is necessary for us to “move forward” with our own Eighth Principle.

According to a 2021 statement by the UUA, the white supremacy culture that was deeply embedded in the churches of our ancestors remains a powerful force “hidden in plain sight” in Unitarian and Universalist congregations today. It is unlikely that we will “accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions” until we do the necessary repentance and repair work for America’s original sin.

If you are interested in this important work, you are invited to join the newly created **UUSA Racial, Religious and Ethnic Justice Circle**. To be added to the mailing list, please contact John Gerber. The next meeting of this group is scheduled for March 21 at 2:00pm on zoom.

In fellowship,

John Gerber, co-president

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NOTE: The unabridged essay along with references and sources may be found here: [Repentance and Repair for America’s Original Sin](#).

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## Social Action



**Reclaim Our Vote is gearing up its postcard campaigns for the primaries!** The UU Society of Amherst has been involved in writing postcards for the past few years. There will be opportunities for folks to write postcards during March and April.

[Reclaim Our Vote](#) is a black-led organization that works with the NAACP to fight voter suppression in key states. They have an excellent track record. This year, there are three ways to participate; click here for more info and to sign up: <https://forms.gle/oW1GqHFsohaHXYQD7>

Questions? Contact UUSA’s **Anne-Louise White**

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## ION Corner

Our January Interfaith Opportunities Network (ION) meeting was held both on Zoom and at the Immanuel Lutheran Church, which is hosting a 24/7 shelter for the unhoused. People using this shelter (managed by Craig's Doors) are welcome to participate in that church's services and programs.

South Congregational Church is celebrating its 200th anniversary this year! There will be many programs/activities to highlight this very important year open to everyone.

Representatives of ION have met with Rabbi Weiner of Jewish Community of Amherst and Naz Mohamed of

the Hampshire Mosque to show our support. Last month ION submitted the following letter to the Gazette and Greenfield Recorder about the crises in Gaza. It was shared with ION faith leaders beforehand.

*The Interfaith Opportunities Network is an organization 21 faith congregations and campus ministries in the Amherst area. Our mission statement says that we are “seeking to strengthen bonds of mutual respect and understanding”. Along with so many in our congregations and in the community at large, we are greatly saddened and concerned about the heart breaking and dire situation in the Mideast and about the repercussions of that situation in this country.*

*Each of the many traditions represented in our organization (which include Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Baha’i, Quakerism, and Unitarian Universalism) all emphasize peace and justice. The roots of our faiths should bring us together.*

*This, and our love and respect for one another across our differences, makes us deeply concerned about the rise in antisemitism and islamophobia in our country. Despite our feelings about what governments and other political organizations may do, we must not let it turn us against our neighbors, no matter who they may be.*

*We are aware that there has been a rise in both antisemitism and islamophobia around the world, including in this country and in our own communities since the attack of October 7<sup>th</sup> and the ensuing war in Gaza. We urge people of all faiths to stand side by side together in resisting all forms of religious bigotry wherever they are encountered. As we examine our own attitudes, we also encourage those in our congregations and in the community at large to speak out against blatant and subtle forms of antisemitism and islamophobia that they may witness.*

### ***Thinking of becoming a member?***

If you’d like information about UUSA Membership, please email the Ministry of Welcome and Membership: [welcome@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:welcome@uusocietyamherst.org)

Our next **Membership Book Signing** is in the sanctuary during the service on **February 11**.

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## **Finance Committee**

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The **Finance Committee** will meet on **Monday, February 12, at 7:15 P.M. on Zoom**.

## **THREE WEEKS IN TRANSYLVANIA, THE CRADLE OF UNITARIANISM (Part 2)**

By Pat Brinkman

*Continued from our December newsletter*

The busy holiday season is over — but in Transylvania — it was a very busy time. We received handmade Christmas cards, were “caroled” over Zoom, have handknit warm socks, and exchanged warm wishes via Facebook, email, messenger, and the Romanian and US postal services.

Here are the socks — on top of a Transylvanian tablecloth and a handwoven trivet (from Körispatak, where we also were in September!):

On January 28, 1568, the Edict of Torda (paraphrasing Wikipedia here) was a decree that authorized local communities to freely elect their preachers in the [Eastern Hungarian Kingdom](#) of [John Sigismund Zápolya](#). The delegates of the [Three Nations of Transylvania](#) — the [Hungarian nobles](#), [Transylvanian Saxons](#), and [Székelys](#) — adopted it at the request of the monarch’s [Antitrinitarian](#) court preacher, [Ferenc Dávid](#), in [Torda](#) ([Romanian](#): *Turda*, [German](#): *Thoren-*





burg). Though it did not acknowledge an individual's right to [religious freedom](#), in sanctioning the existence of a radical Christian religion in a European state, the decree was an unprecedented act of [religious tolerance](#). ... In practice, the edict only sanctioned the existence of four “received” denominations – the Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and [Unitarian](#) Churches.

The word “Unitarian” was not used yet — but these were our origins.

In September, we were in Torda, where the 450th Anniversary of the Edict was commemorated.



In December, we showed one of our first-time travelers “fridge pics” — here’s ours. And if you are interested, we have an entire library to share with you!

