



ITHACA

UUU Connections

2023/2024 Issue No. 6

February 1-29, 2024

Our Spiritual Journey

It is fitting that we shift from beginning our new year focused on the liberating love that we hold as the center of our faith, a love through which we work to transform the world, to justice and equity. For are not the work of both justice and equity also the call of a love which seeks to free us all?

Current UUA President Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt says of our Unitarian Universalist faith that “Right now, I think it is on a journey from liberal to liberation.” Both traditions from which our current faith were born, Unitarianism and Universalism, prided themselves on being exactly that, liberal religions. A moniker which our current faith also bears proudly. To be a liberal faith means to be a faith that is open to new ideas. A faith that is progressive and open-minded, that promotes civil liberty and democracy.

And yet Unitarian Universalism is now at a moment when we have the potential to move beyond being open to change to instead creating change. We have the opportunity to remake our communities into ones where people of all backgrounds and identities are welcomed with pre-emptive radical inclusion. Where we openly and unflinchingly challenge systems of oppression, patriarchy and white supremacy.

Our own beloved community member Dorothy Cotton said “One has to be open to the truth that at some level we are all the same and want the same things, like a peaceful community in which to live and grow and thrive.” We have the chance before us now to make these changes a reality. To move beyond a liberal mindset to, not just a belief in, but an imperative to work towards liberation for all.



That faith, the one that centers love, and justice, and equity, that is the faith that inspires me, that has called me to pursue the work of ministry. How are you inspired to respond to its call?

Emily Richards, Director of Congregational Life and Religious Exploration

Emergency Pastoral Care

In case of pastoral need, call Kathy Hopkins at 607-592-3025. She will direct pastoral needs for weddings, memorial services and emergency pastoral care to Rev. Janet Shortall.

In-Person Sunday Services

10:30 am in the Sanctuary

Services will also be live-streamed on our YouTube channel.

Nursery childcare and Religious Exploration classes for children are open.

Did you know you can text in your donations to the offering plate on Sundays? Simply text 607-260-6616 with the amount + offering (eg: \$5 offering) to donate by phone. It's super easy!

Religious Exploration News

For information about Religious Exploration, please contact Emily Richards at dre@uuithaca.org.

Greetings from the DRE

As Unitarian Universalists we are called to lift up our core values of justice and equity in all that we do. And nowhere is this more true than in our Religious Exploration programming and offerings. Teaching our children and youth how to navigate the world that we live in while centering a love for all that helps to bring about justice and equity is foundational to who we are. We understand that our children will be the next generation of leaders and activists and that it is our collective responsibility to guide and support them as they figure out what it is that they truly believe in. What is important to them. And what kind of world they dare to dream about.

We hold love as the center of this faith, and it is with love that we travel with you as we work to bring about justice, dismantle systems of oppression, and create a more equitable world where everyone can live and thrive.

Emily Richards CRE, Director of Religious Exploration

Classroom Sundays

Elementary: This past month the elementary aged children explored the Gifts of Liberating Love which included collecting donations for the Food Sharing Cabinets and a walking field trip during our Creative Sunday to fill several of the downtown cabinets. This month they will continue to explore our faith through the Gifts of Justice and Equity.

Middle School and High School: The youth will be continuing their Crossing Paths journey by exploring both the teachings of Buddhism this month with a visit to Nyamgal Buddhist Monastery. It is very important that all youth who are participating in these visits are also attending on Sunday mornings so that they have the foundation of understanding necessary to make this a meaningful experience. Please register your youth at the link below if they plan to attend.

[Permission Form Namgyal Monastery](#)

If you are interested in driving youth and attending some of these trips to learn more about the diversity of faith traditions in our communities please email Emily Richards at dre@uuithaca.org.

RE Registration

If you haven't already done so, please register your children below for the 2023-2024 Religious Exploration program! This information helps us to plan for the upcoming year.

[First Unitarian Society of Ithaca RE Registration Form 2023-2024](#)

Religious Exploration Wishlist

If you are looking to support the RE program and would like to purchase a gift, here is a list of items that would be useful and deeply appreciated.

[RE Wishlist](#)

RE Volunteer Opportunities

We have so much appreciation for all of the community members who have volunteered to enrich our community through participating in our Religious Exploration programming. With special thanks to our new classroom teachers: Rita Barber, Josephine Ennis, Seema Mathur, John Gaines, and Mike Timonin.

We are in need of a volunteer for the 2nd-5th grade classroom this spring so please reach out if working with our young people brings you joy and fulfillment.

Volunteering for the RE program is a gift of welcome that we all have to give and I hope you will consider joining our amazing team of volunteers. This important programming can only happen with the support of the entire community.

[FUSIT 2023-2024 RE Volunteer Sign Up](#)

Please join our FUSIT Parents Facebook Group
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/fusitparents>

Into the Circle

By Rev. Dr. David Breeden

We gather into this circle.
We gather into this circle of care
to dream, to envision,
to embody and achieve
the compassion we dream,
the justice we envision,
the dignity of each
in an ever-growing
circle of love and justice.

(RE News continued from page 2)

Religious Exploration Schedule for February

February 4th - Classroom Sunday
February 11th - Multigenerational Service
February 18th - Creative Sunday
February 25th - Classroom Sunday

Nursery

The Nursery will be open every Sunday from 10 am-12 pm for young children between the ages of 0 and 4.

Volunteers are needed to help fill in for the Nursery. You can volunteer as little as once or twice a year, or as much as once a month! Please contact our Childcare Coordinator, Melissa Heslop at childcare@uuithaca.org to get your name on the list!

Religious Exploration Events for February

Valentine's Day Cards and Crafts
Sunday, February 11th
12 pm-2 pm in the Annex

Join us for a celebration of love as we make crafts and cards together just in time for Valentine's Day celebrations. Everyone should have access to fun and creative ways to share the love so, as always, this event is free and open to the public.

Music for Little People **February 6th and 20th**

Every Other Tuesday from 1 pm-1:45 pm
Arch Room

Share in the joy of music in this bi-weekly class which is free and open to the public. Children 0-5 and their caregivers are welcome to meet us in the Arch Room on two Tuesdays in February. Sing, play, dance, explore instruments, and connect through music.

MUUSIC for You and Me **Sunday, February 4th**

12:00 pm-12:45 pm
Arch Room

Explore our UU values through the joy and connection that music can bring in this monthly class for parents, caregivers, and young people of all ages.

February Worship Services

The theme for February is "The Gifts of Justice and Equity" and the Celebrations Team is looking forward to speakers whose voices can help us to explore this theme as individuals and as a community.

Sunday, February 4 **"Beyond the Political Correctness of Justice and Equity"** Rev. Peaches Gillette

Our staunch political correctness of concepts like justice and equity has turned into the policing of one another, exactly what the movement toward the fair application of these principles was trying to undo.

Special music by Stephanie Ortolano

Sunday, February 11 **"Music Team Sunday: Crys Matthews"**

Crys Matthews

Crys' Mission Statement is to amplify the voices of the unheard, to shed light on the unseen, and to be a steadfast reminder that hope and love are the truest pathways to equity and justice. Crys will be sharing her story and her music with us on this special Music Team Sunday.

Special music by Crys Matthews

Sunday, February 18 **"Change Through Community"**

Sara Catterall

Thoughts on the life of Amelia Bloomer, whose reliance on and devotion to community led her to become an unlikely leader for social change.

Special music TBA

Sunday, February 25 **"The Future is Ours to Create"**

Emily Richards, Director of Congregational Life

What future would we create if anything and everything we imagined could come to be? And what would it take to get there? Let us celebrate all that this vibrant and growing community is already offering and imagine, together, what new possibilities our support and involvement can make a reality.

Special music by FUSIT Choir

Pub Theology

Tuesday, **February 27**, 6:30 pm

Liquid State Brewing

Join us at Liquid State Brewing for an evening of good fellowship and conversation at our favorite local brewery (owned by FUSIT members!). We will gather at 6:30 pm and reflect together on our monthly theme of *The Gifts of Justice and Equity*. Non-beer and non-alcoholic drinks options available! 21 and over please. Bring your friends! Hope to see you there! Pub Theology takes place on the 4th Tuesday of every month at 620 West Green Street, Ithaca.



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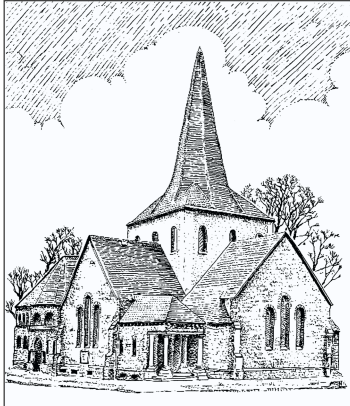
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**First Unitarian is a
UUA-recognized LGBTQ+
Welcoming Congregation**

The First Unitarian Society of Ithaca
306 North Aurora Street
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Visit our Website and get
your newsletter:
www.uuithaca.org



Possible Ponderings

The theme for February is The Gifts of Justice and Equity

Possible Ponderings is an offering of ways you might consider engaging more deeply with the theme or reflecting on the ways the idea of The Gifts of Justice and Equity shows up in your life.

February 1-3: How has love changed as you've gotten older? Is it softer? Quieter? Tougher? More painful? More universal? More ordinary? More mysterious? More demanding?

February 4-10: Whose love has companioned you the longest?

February 11-17: Some say the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. Others say its opposite is fear. What do you say?

February 18-24: In what new way are you being called to use your personal/social/cultural/economic power in the service of love?

February 25-29: If Love could speak, what do you think it would want to say to you?



LGBTQ+ Group

Wednesday, February 21, 7:00-8:30 pm

This Small Group is especially for FUSIT's LGBTQ+ community. We are meeting on the third Wednesday of the month. *All who identify on the LGBTQ+ continuum are welcome.*

Come enjoy this opportunity for fellowship and community within our larger FUSIT community, in a safe, confidential and nurturing environment. For more information, please contact Ely at eleanorwillard97@gmail.com.

LGBTQ+ Welcoming Renewal Identity Survey

As a part of our Welcoming Congregation Renewal process, we are reaching out to better understand our congregation, and our many held identities.

Please fill out our Identity Survey and help us to better serve this community.

[Identity Survey](#)

National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day February 7

National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NBHAAD), a national HIV testing and treatment community mobilization initiative targeted at Blacks in the United States and the Diaspora. An LGBTQ+ Day of Observance on the 1st Wednesday of February.



Social Justice Leadership Team (SJLT) Activities and Opportunities

We hope you will consider joining us in our social justice efforts and encourage you to reach out and learn more about how you can get involved. Email sjlt@uuithaca.org for more information.

Shared Plate

The Shared Plate for February will support Ithaca Mobile Pack, sponsors of the annual event for *Feed My Starving Children*. This international organization provides life-saving meals worldwide to people who need it the most. The local Ithaca Mobile Pack is sponsored by ACT (Area Congregations Together), of which we are a member.

Side with Love

For the month of February we'll be collecting body soap and toilet paper (4 pack) for Village at Ithaca. Please leave your donations in the basket in the parlor, which is marked "Village of Ithaca".

8th Principle Action Ministry

The 8th Principle Action Ministry (formerly the Antiracism Ministry Team) meets every fourth Wednesday, so they will meet via Zoom at 7 pm on **February 28**. They will be continuing educational efforts so that we may as a congregation "accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions."

Environmental Interest Circle (EIC) - February 7 at 7 pm

We will organize next steps for each of us and the congregation to keep saving money and improve the sustainability of our lives. Meetings are the first Wednesday of the month. All are welcome. Please join us. Contact Matt Franke-Singer at mfs@twcny.rr.com for further information. Meeting held in the Parlor and over Zoom.

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/81644753524?
pwd=SDBqaTN5eIM3ejltbGdJeGhPa3QxQT09](https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/81644753524?pwd=SDBqaTN5eIM3ejltbGdJeGhPa3QxQT09)

Meeting ID: 816 4475 3524

Passcode: 894885

Help Needed to Provide Lunches for the Homeless

As a member of Area Congregations Together (ACT), FUSIT finds four volunteers to provide fifteen lunches apiece to the Ithaca homeless shelter on the first Tuesday of each month.

We are now seeking two more volunteers for **February 6**. You would buy supplies, make the lunches within 24 hours of delivery, and deliver them between 9:30 and 11:30 am to SJCS Day Center at 618 W. State Street. Deliveries are made through a window on State Street.

Each lunch should include a sandwich, a piece of soft fruit, and a cookie or other small dessert. Social Justice can reimburse your expenses, at your request. To volunteer and/or ask questions, please contact Jackie Jablonski at jackiejab@me.com.

Thursday Choir Rehearsals

First Unitarian Choir rehearsals are every Thursday at 7 pm in the Annex and the choir performs on the last Sunday service of each month. Come sing with us! For more information, contact Choir Director, Jayne Demakos, choir@uuithaca.org.

Care Cafes

Sundays, February 11 and 25

12:15 - 1:45 pm in the FUSIT library

The Care Cafes provide an intimate, loving space for members to come together and share their thoughts and feelings, and their joys and sorrows as they navigate along their spiritual paths, both as individuals and as part of a community. The Care Cafe will be facilitated by Rev. Peaches Gillette and Christine Kapral, both professionals trained in counseling, pastoral care and spiritual directions. Each gathering will focus on a loosely structured theme around spirituality, encouraging participants to freely explore all aspects of their spiritual journeys. Please contact Christine or Rev. Peaches with any questions.

There will be a sign-up sheet in the parlor on each scheduled day during coffee hour for those who plan to attend.

Rev. Peaches Gillette assocdcl@uuithaca.org

Christine Kapral christinekapral@yahoo.com

Human Needs Fund

What if someone in our congregation finds themselves in sudden financial distress? Is there a way for our caring community to help in a timely, confidential manner? It is that very situation that motivated the FUSIT Board to create the "Human Needs Fund" in 2015.

In 2021, the HNF fund had a balance of \$4,736.17. Since then, seven congregants have benefited from this fund with help ranging from \$40 to \$1000. A designated representative of the FUSIT Care Team approves the disbursement of checks, preferably paid to an organization owed rather than "cash". A confidential record is kept of all transactions and only one payment per household is allowed annually.

We are in desperate need of replenishing this fund.

Click here <https://fusit.breezechms.com/give/online> to donate. Or checks can be made out to FUSIT. Please indicate HUMAN NEEDS FUND in the memo. Send the check to FUSIT OFFICE, Ithaca, P.O. Box 6, Ithaca, NY 14851.

Thank you for your generous help in keeping this important fund viable.



Social Media Connections

You can find out about events happening in our congregation, see pictures of past events and connect with other UUs. Like and follow us on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/FUSofI/> and Instagram www.instagram.com/ithacauus

Adult Religious Exploration (ARE) Programs

PLEASE NOTE. Based on recent survey results, **Adult Religious Exploration (ARE) programs are now scheduled for NOON IN THE ANNEX after the close of the Sunday services.** This offers enough time in the parlor to enjoy a cup of coffee or tea, a snack, and a bit of socializing before heading up to the annex for continued friendly learning and discussion. All are welcome.

Sunday, February 4

Dick Kurtz

Do you wish you could help those harmed when there's a natural disaster or humanitarian crisis situation? But don't know how to engage with an organization to help? Don't know if you have useful skills? Wonder if you're physically, mentally, up to the possible challenges?

Dick Kurtz will present his story of the disaster, the people, and the experience at three projects working with an amazing NGO: Restoring damaged homes after hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. Converting a school in Poland into Ukrainian war refugee winter housing. And recovery/rebuilding efforts in Turkey following last year's earthquake.

Sunday, February 18

The Healing Power of Song

In this talk and group singing experience, Elisa S. Keeler highlights the therapeutic and uplifting aspects of community singing. Together we'll learn simple, soulful songs as we create harmony, connection and joy.

Elisa S. Keeler MA Transpersonal Psychology is an Interfaith Minister, retreat facilitator, song leader and composer. She moved to Ithaca 25 years ago to pursue degrees in Music Education and Vocal Performance from Ithaca College.

Elisa is a teacher of the [Hidden Treasure Program](#) at Light on the Hill Retreat Center. She is the founder of [Freeing Your Voice](#), a singing class for adults that meets in the Arch Room at the First Unitarian Society of Ithaca. Visit www.elisamusic.com to access her music and additional offerings.

Winter Open Question

The Board would like to hear from you!

Each year the Board engages the congregation through a series of Open Questions. The responses to these questions help inform the decisions of the Board and the Ministry, and serve to guide the development of the Vision of Ministry for the future.

The Open Question for this Winter is: **How could FUSIT evolve and transform to continue to meet the needs of the community and also prepare for the future?**

Please take a moment today to write down an answer and drop it in the basket on the table just outside the door to the sanctuary or email a response to board@UUithaca.org.

Please send responses by
March 15th.

Joys and Sorrows

Joys and Sorrows are now shared during Sunday Service. Please send notices to the team at joysandsorrows@uuithaca.org. When considering what is shared in Joys and Sorrows, please note, these services are live streamed and available to the public on our YouTube Channel.

There will be a memorial to honor beloved congregant Amelia Habicht on Saturday, **February 24** at 2 pm. All are welcome to help celebrate Amelia's life.

A joy from Mary Clabby:

"My joy is the birth of little Frances 'Frankie' Clabby born January 9. She is the first daughter of my son, Brian Clabby and his wife Jamie Lawson Clabby in Chicago. And my first granddaughter."

A joy from Barbara Shew: "Sam Weeks celebrated his 88th birthday on January 13th. Congratulations Sam!! We sure are glad you are part of our First Unitarian Community!!"

And another joy from Loretta Heimbuch: "Barbara Shew recently celebrated her 95th birthday! Congratulations, Barb! You are such an inspiration to others in this congregation and the local community."

Appreciations

As we nurture a culture of appreciation at FUSIT, let's sing praises to the many people who help make our community the wonderful place it is. Who here at First Unitarian Society of Ithaca have you noticed doing something above and beyond, who has been a quiet unsung hero, or who is doing an exceptional job? It can be a member or staff or friend to our community. Send your submissions to joysandsorrows@uuithaca.org.

An appreciation from Barb Shew (Sunday, January 14):

"I want you all to know how wonderful this day has been for me! Even though I didn't attend the coffee hour tribute for my 95th birthday, due to minor illness and extreme weather, I was there in spirit! What a thoughtful thing to do from so many! I am so appreciative!"

Madonna was so gracious to bring me a beautiful bouquet, card signed by the children and two luscious cake slices. To top it off, she took a video of members singing and waving to me that warmed my heart! Thank you, Madonna and everyone who participated! FUSIT is Love!"

From joAnn kowalski:

"Appreciation for Jackie Jablonski who continues to coordinate and organize FUSIT's role to supply lunches once a month to St. John's Shelter. Thank you, Jackie, for your steadfast effort in supporting this critical community need."

Breeze "How To"

The First Unitarian Society of Ithaca uses the Breeze Content Management System for our database. Breeze can be a useful tool for congregants in many ways, including accessing the event calendar, checking your giving history, finding out the members of the various teams and committees and more!

[Click here](#) for some basic information on how to use Breeze. It's much easier than you may think!

Office Schedule

During the winter, the office will be open on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 9 am - 4 pm. In cases of inclement weather, Michelle will work remotely. Please note that the office will be closed on **February 19th and 23rd.**

Important Office Deadlines:

- Weekly Announce Email Submissions: to Michelle by Monday at noon
- Order of Service Submissions: to Michelle by Monday at noon
- Tables in the parlor for Sunday's coffee hour: request from Michelle by Thursday at noon

Women's Circle on February 26

Women's Circle usually meets via Zoom on the 4th Monday of the month from 7-8:30 pm. All who identify as women are welcome. This is a drop-in group, so no need to sign up; just come. Anyone is welcome to bring a poem or a reading. For information or questions contact Nancy Miller at ananda7733@gmail.com or 607-539-7733.

Zoom Link: <https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/82169260621?pwd=ZDkyanRKMmo2czhqSWgrSVhmbGFqdzo9>

Meeting ID: 821 6926 0621. Passcode: 015515

Expanding Community

For many the pandemic and our increasingly busy, digital world bring about heightened feelings of isolation and being cut off from others. We always welcome new members to our community and faith and hope to provide a safe space of connection and learning for all during this time of physical distancing. Please continue to invite any and all people that you know that you believe could find meaning by exploring what the Unitarian Universalist faith can offer.



From the Music Team

Beacon on Aurora, our monthly concert series, continues on Sunday, **February 11**, for an evening with **Crys Matthews**.

In the Sanctuary of First Unitarian at 7:00 pm

A troubadour of truth, Nashville resident Crys Matthews is among the brightest stars of the new generation of social justice music-makers. An award-winning, prolific lyricist and composer, Matthews blends Americana, folk, blues, and bluegrass into a bold, complex performance steeped in traditional melodies punctuated by honest, original lyrics. She is made for these times. Her hope-fueled, love-filled, social-justice album called *Changemakers* was released March 26, 2021, and the title track was named the International Folk Music Association's "Song of the Year" in May of 2022. Doors open at 6:30 and the concert starts at 7 pm.

\$20 suggested donation at the door. Cash preferred.

For more information and to reserve your ticket, go to <https://unitarian.ithaca.ny.us/index.php/beacon-on-aurora/>

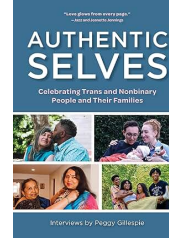
Contact Music Director, Stephanie Ortolano, at music@uithaca.org if you are interested in helping make this series a success! Bakers, coffee makers, and ushers needed!

Soul Matters Material for February - The Gifts of Justice and Equity

The Soul Matters theme for February is *The Gifts of Justice and Equity*. This month's packet includes a few short readings, spiritual exercises, and discussion questions for you to consider.

The material can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/SoulMattersFeb2024>



LGBTQ+ Book Discussion Group

This book group will continue to discuss "*Authentic Selves, Celebrating Trans and Nonbinary People and Their Families*" on **February 12, March 11 and April 8.**

The group meets from 7 - 8 pm via Zoom. All are invited to attend. The compelling 35 stories provide a glimpse into the real lives, both the challenges and triumphs, of these remarkable people and their families. The January meeting encompassed the first 9 stories and in February we'll continue to discuss the next 9 (which begin on page 92). We encourage you to attend, even if you have not read the book or haven't read all the stories for that month, as we engage in lively and important conversations around this topic. Copies of the book can be found in our church library and at the Tompkins County Public Library. It is also available on Kindle for \$9.99. Loretta Heimbuch (adminasst@uithaca.org) and Barb Shew (barbrandy51@gmail.com) co-lead the discussions. This program is part of FUSIT's commitment to renewing our status as an LGBTQ+ Welcoming Congregation. Check the mid-week announcements for the Zoom link.

Nametags

If you would like a nametag, please fill out the **nametag request form** at the Welcome Table or contact adminasst@uithaca.org and we'll make one for you.

Then look for your new nametag at the Welcome Table after the Sunday service.

Save The Date for Unirondack! September, 2nd-5th 2024

More information to come and registration will be opened to the community some time in **April.**

First Unitarian is a
UUA-recognized LGBTQ+ Welcoming
Congregation



From the Board of Trustees

The image of a barn-raising springs to mind when I think of how the First Unitarian Society works. To me, FUSIT represents a continuous act of creativity, skill, and pulling together, carried out by literally dozens of people. Our dedicated and talented staff members “build the frame” of the whole operation, providing the foundation and all the fundamentals; and then dozens of volunteers from the congregation help fill in the walls. The sum of all these parts is an amazing, ongoing act of generosity that lights up our community.

A sketch of a few of FUSIT’s teams may give you an idea of how much goes on. There are teams to put our 8th Principle (anti-racism) into action, and to further other Social Justice work, such as our donations to local nonprofits; our support for Village at Ithaca; and resolving medical debt. Babies First provides needed equipment to new parents to keep their babies comfortable and safe. The Care Team addresses congregants’ needs for emotional support. The Small Group facilitators nurture participants’ spiritual growth. Many teams enrich our experience of Sunday services and other FUSIT events: the Religious Exploration Team, Celebrations Team, Music Team, Tech Team, Hospitality Team, and Adult RE (Religious Exploration) Team. There are more teams, and also committees! Volunteers play a vital role across the board.

Many years ago, I struggled to decide whether to commit to volunteer work. I was concerned about giving up some free time and taking on more responsibilities. But once I tried it, volunteering quickly became a way of life. It gives me a sense of purpose, and a meaningful role to play in the community.

It has greatly enriched my life. If you decide to volunteer at FUSIT, you will have many opportunities to choose from!

Margaret Nichols

February Trustees Meeting

The February meeting will be held Tuesday, **February 20**, at 6:30 pm. The board meeting is a hybrid format, taking place in the church parlor and through Zoom. Monthly board meetings are held on the third Tuesday of the month. All FUSIT members are invited to attend this meeting. Ten minutes are set aside at the beginning of the meeting for congregation feedback. Please join us!

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/>

[88258776990pwd=VUxUTUMraVZDUFQzQndSVFRraFIPdz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88258776990?pwd=VUxUTUMraVZDUFQzQndSVFRraFIPdz09)

Meeting ID: 882 5877 6990 Passcode: 602445

Our Mission

*Our mission is to create connection, find inspiration and engage the world.
Connect. Inspire. Engage.*

Ministry Visioning Team Looking Forward to 2024

The Ministry Visioning Team (MVT) is looking forward to the new year and new opportunities to help guide ministry at FUSIT. Rev Janet Shortall (Director of Pastoral Care), Emily Richards (Director of Religious Education [DRE] and Director of Congregational Life [DCL]), joAnn kowalski, Don Rakow, and Nancy Miller are members and the team meets twice a month.

Looking back at the end of 2023, December saw many activities for members and their families to celebrate the holiday season including the No Rehearsal Holiday Pageant, the Winter Solstice Celebration held at the Winter Garden at Cornell Botanic Gardens and the Community Candlelight Christmas Service at Sage Chapel. All were well attended, and we are grateful for all who participated and volunteered in making the celebrations so wonderful and a continuing part of FUSIT’s traditions.

As part of MVT’s charge, the team continues to support and supervise the Ministry Staff in their varied and important responsibilities. MVT also considers the well-being of staff and is looking to work with the Board in this area. Also included in their charge is support of the various teams that are active at FUSIT. A monthly Team Leader Council (TLC) meeting is held for team leaders to share information and activities each month on the first Tuesday of each month. MVT met with the Social Justice Leadership Team (SJLT) recently where they presented initiatives they have planned and discussed future goals as a team addressing social justice issues.

Representatives from MVT have been appointed to participate on the budget team. The team is charged with creating and delivering to the Board at its April meeting a one-year operations budget and a two-year capital budget. This is an important and essential function for the continued operation of FUSIT.

MVT is looking forward to an upcoming meeting with Board members to discuss several important topics of concern. Communication of MVT’s activities to the Board continues with the monthly board report.

Please contact the Ministry Visioning Team with any questions you may have. Email us at mvt@uithaca.org.



Message from the Stewardship Team

Gifts Grow Connection

*Do you know what a **Gifts Economy** is?*

This year, Gifts is the heart of our Stewardship Campaign. Let me explain: many indigenous cultures, including our Haudenosaunee antecedents whose lands were appropriated by our government, traditionally practiced a gifting economy. Gift economies are based in relationships between living beings.

For our indigenous neighbors, all things are living and imbued with spirit. In a gift economy there are no one-way transactions; gifts carry with them a responsibility of reciprocating and paying attention to our debtor status with people, ancestors, family, future generations and mother earth. Indigenous ceremonies, including treaty signings, were first and foremost gift exchanges to cement relationships among the parties. Gifting also is central to traditional indigenous justice systems. All this is quite different than the one-way transactional consumer economy we operate in, where there is no relationship between buyer or donor other than a financial transaction. Both economies are grounded in faith, but which one seems closer to our UU values?

First Unitarian Society embodies the collective gift the community gives to each of us. We can reciprocate with participation, volunteer service, committee work, and dollars. When we pledge a donation to the operating funds for the next church year, it is not a tithe (biblical obligation of 10% of earnings based on God's law), although some UUs believe a financial obligation is incurred when becoming a member.

We propose that you think about pledging and service with a gifting sentiment whereby your gift builds connection and fertilizes relationships, and thus gets reciprocated in a thousand small ways. This isn't dreamy or wishful thinking. There are tangible ways in which your pledge supports our staff and operations, and in turn the FUSIT ministry and programs enrich our lives by connecting each of us and our relationships with faith, love and action. Don't make it about money - make it about love, for yourself and others.

*This year's pledge campaign launch ceremony will be at the **February 25** Sunday service. Look for your pledge card in the mail before then. You are invited to fill out your card and dance it down the aisles during Sunday service (or walk, slither, hop, roll).*

*At least two opportunities to break bread together (another form of gifting that cements relationships) are planned for late winter/spring. The first will be at noon on **February 25** in the Annex. Please join one of the 2024 StewardSoup lunches celebrating the many people, and many ways that we embrace and nurture each other and our broader community.*

If you would like to help make the lunch a success in any small or large way, or if you want to learn more about what service on the Stewardship Team looks like, please contact Stewardship@uithaca.org.

*Matt Hare & the Stewardship Team
Jeanette Knapp, Margaret Nichols, Jack Roscoe, Wendy Schaerer*