



ITHACA

UU Connections

2025/2026 Issue No. 3

November 2025

Our Spiritual Journey

There is an ancient Jewish prayer called the “Modeh Ani” or “I Thank” prayer that is intended to be the very first action that a person takes upon waking each morning. The ancient words are mostly commonly translated as:

I give thanks before you, God living and eternal, for You have returned within me my soul with compassion; abundant is Your faithfulness.

In English we translate the prayer as starting with word I, I give thanks. And yet the first word of the prayer isn't אני Ani, which is the word for I, it's מודה Modeh, which means thanks or thank you. Modeh is best understood as a human emotion that doesn't have a direct translation into English and it means not simply to give thanks, or feel thankful, but also to admit or surrender. And I wondered at first what these three words, that in English have such different meanings, had in common. As I sat in contemplation turning these words over in my mind it came to me that there is a sense of humility in each of these feelings. The feeling of being thankful, of admitting, of surrendering, each require an acknowledgement in some way of something greater than ourselves.

And it is worth noting again that in the original Hebrew the first word of the prayer is not Ani, or I, but Modeh, meaning thanks. So the intention of this prayer is that the first word to pass your lips each day, the first sound that you make upon waking, is gratitude.

As Unitarian Universalists we lift up the wisdom that is found in all religions and hold pluralism as one of the core values of this faith. This month as we Nurture Gratitude within ourselves and the world around us, we may draw from the wisdom of the Jewish tradition and greet each day with gratitude and thanks, opening up with humility to the spirit of love and life, that eternal presence that holds us with compassion and care.

May it be so.

Emily Richards, Director of Congregational Life

Sunday Celebration at 10:30 am in the Sanctuary.

Live-streamed on our YouTube channel.

[https://www.youtube.com/
@FirstUnitarianSocietyofIthaca/streams](https://www.youtube.com/@FirstUnitarianSocietyofIthaca/streams)

*Nursery childcare and Religious Exploration
classes for children.*

Chili and Cornbread Lunch

Sunday, **November 23rd**, 11:45 am -1 pm in the Annex

Please join us for the return of our annual Cider and Cornbread Communion during services followed by a shared meal of chili and cornbread in the Annex.

Cooks Needed

Do you have an amazing chili or cornbread recipe that you would love to share? Would you like to help make mini cornbread muffins for our communion? We need volunteers to make cornbread and/or a pot of chili for our **November 23rd** Cornbread Communion and Chili event. Options that are gluten free, vegan, and allergen friendly are especially welcome.

Please [sign up here](#).

Reminder:

Daylight Saving Time Ends on
Sunday, November 2, 2025



Religious Exploration News

For information about Religious Exploration, please contact Madeline Natale at dre@uuithaca.org

Greetings from the Director of Religious Exploration

In the spirit of Nurturing Gratitude, I would like to send a ginormous thank you to all of the RE Volunteers who have made it possible to expand our classrooms and nourish our children.

I am grateful for a community that welcomes children as they are. A community that actively tries to make space for noise and silliness and the beautiful chaos that is childhood. I feel grateful for our children. The life of the church. The joy, the growth, the excitement, and the patience that they bring every weekend (because let's be real, it takes a lot of patience for our young ones to sit for any amount of time.)

I feel grateful for the place of love that we are all striving to act from and the values that bring us together.

With Love and Gratitude, Madeline

November Classroom Sundays

This month the elementary aged children will explore our monthly theme "Nurturing Gratitude" through stories, activities, crafts, and games.

Middle School will begin to explore their Unitarian Universalist Values through the lens of other faith traditions using the "Crossing Paths" Curriculum.

Youth who are in *Highschool* participate in a Connect Circle, exploring various spiritual practices and the meaning of intentional community.

Please register your children below for the 2025-2026 Religious Exploration program! This information helps us to plan for the upcoming year.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd25nAdfKS-DrbPQF2Xum7a_oqg2j7Epf2hOcAWcnmRxWmt3A/viewform?usp=header

Volunteer Involvement

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. 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.

As we begin to shift into the winter months, it is important to begin collecting new RE volunteers to join the kind and nurturing team of RE Teachers. Classrooms run twice a month for all of the 5 classrooms. We have substitutes available to cover any Sunday that you might not be available for and the schedule is already made, making it much easier for all of us to plan ahead! [2025-2026 RE Classroom Schedule](#)

Please join our [First UU Ithaca Parents Facebook Group](#)!

Religious Exploration Schedule for November

November 2 - Classroom Sunday

November 9 - Classroom Sunday

November 16 - Creative Sunday

November 23 - Multigenerational Sunday

November 30 - Classroom Sunday

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

Our Whole Lives (OWL) for 8th-9th and 10-12th Graders

The First Unitarian Society of Ithaca is excited to offer the Our Whole Lives comprehensive sexuality education program during the school year 2025-2026. Our 10th-12th graders will start OWL on November 2 (register now!). Our 8th-9th grader program will run again in 2026-2027.

All dates including the two required options for Parent Orientation can be found on the registration form.

Register your 10th-12th grader for OWL here:

[10-12 Our Whole Lives \(OWL\) Registration](#)

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](#)



Middle School Youth Group after our Crossing Paths field trip.

November Religious Exploration Events

Friends-giving Potluck and Holiday Decorating

Join us on Friday, **November 21st** for a friends and family potluck followed by holiday decorating and crafting in the parlor! This event will run from 5:30-8 pm. Bring a dish, beverage, or sweet to share! All are welcome. [Register Here](#)

Connection Circle for Parents - Childcare Provided

Sunday, **November 16th**, 12 pm-1 pm
Sophia Lyon Fahs Room

Our Connection Circle for individuals who are actively parenting will begin meeting again this month. Gatherings will take place monthly on the third Sunday of the month from 12pm-1pm, with childcare available. We invite you to join us for an opportunity for fellowship and community within our larger First UU community, in a safe, confidential and nurturing environment.

Music for Little People

Wednesday, **November 12th and 26th**
12 pm-12:45 pm, Arch Room

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

Adult RE

Building a Better World

Explore a Better world through the table top role-playing game curriculum "Building a Better World". This RPG group will meet in room 213 at 4 pm on **November 2nd**. Reach out to Mike Timonin if you have any questions.

Pub Theology

Tuesday, **November 25**, 6:30 pm
Liquid State Brewing, 620 W. Green Street, Ithaca

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 Nurturing Gratitude. 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.

November Worship Services

The theme for November is "Nurturing Gratitude" 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, November 2, Service of Remembrance, Emily Richards, CRE

As we move into the dark half of the year, we enter a sacred time when many traditions pause to honor their ancestors and beloved dead. As the veil between worlds grows thin and the presence of the spirits is felt more closely let us gather in the deep stillness, giving thanks for those who came before and for the love that we carry still.

Music by Laura Ramos

Sunday, November 9, "The Blessing That Carries Us" Rev. Janet Shortall

In a time of turmoil and fatigue, what sustains our spirits and renews our strength for action? This service explores gratitude and blessing as deep sources of resilience and courage, drawing on stories of surprising compassion and the power of blessing to carry us forward when hope feels fragile.

Music by UU Choir

Sunday, November 16, "Cultivating Gratitude" Rev. Peaches Gillette

Is gratitude what we cultivate, or is it character—the capacity to recognize and appreciate goodness, beauty, and gain even within a world suffused with hardships?

Gratitude comes naturally to everyone. Learning to hold onto it is where the challenge begins.

Music by VOICES Chorus

Sunday, November 23, "Gather in Thanks", Emily Richards, CRE

Let us come together in gratitude for the season and this community, taking part in the nourishment of our annual Cider and Cornbread Communion. Join us for a service that will engage all ages, filled with story, song, and connection. Please stay for our chili and cornbread lunch to follow.

Music by Ithaca Children & Youth Chorus

Sunday, November 30, "Lessons I learned as a South African diplomat in Palestine" Sue Mann

Fresh from post-apartheid South Africa, Sue was a young diplomat (and later acting head of mission) in Palestine from 1997-2001. 30 years later she reflects on the enduring lessons of that time.

Music by Jayne Demakos

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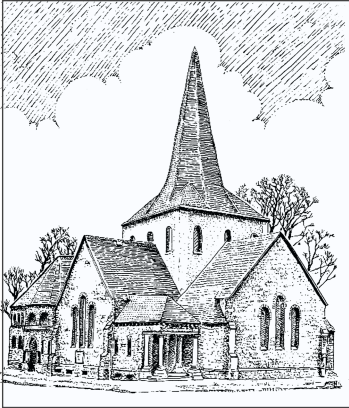
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First Unitarian is a UUA-recognized (LGBTQ) Welcoming Congregation

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

Possible Ponderings

The theme for November is Nurturing Gratitude.

*Possible Ponderings is an offering of ways you might consider engaging more deeply with the theme or reflecting on the ways the idea of **Nurturing Gratitude** shows up in your life.*

November 1-7: Is there something you used to be grateful for that you now take for granted? What would it take to view it with fresh eyes?

November 8-14: You are aware that your life is someone else's dream, right?

November 15-21: How good are you at *receiving* thanks?

November 22-28: Autumn leaves burn bright with color, but if you blink, they are gone. So what temporary blaze of beauty do you need to give your gratitude and attention to before time runs out?

November 29-30: How might gratitude be calling you to shift your thanks from what is extraordinary and rare to what is abundantly ordinary?

Parking

The church does not have a parking lot, but there is free parking on the nearby city streets on Sundays and the Town of Ithaca allows us to use their lot on Sundays (on the corner of Aurora and Buffalo, directly across from the church). Please do not park in the lot next to the church on Aurora St.

Current Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteering is a great way to meet others in the First Unitarian Community and give back at the same time! Current Volunteer Opportunities can be found here: <https://unitarian.ithaca.ny.us/index.php/connection/volunteer/>

FUSIT Listserv

If you would like to be added to the First Unitarian Society of Ithaca listserv, please fill out the form at <https://fusit.breezechms.com/form/oe48af>. If you have any questions, email Michelle at office@uuithaca.org.

***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!***

Social Justice

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. Find more information about various teams on our website.

Side with Love and Shared Plate

Teams, Committees, and Small Groups are invited to sponsor a month for our Side with Love and Shared Plate Collections. The group would be responsible for choosing the organization, communicating with that organization about needed items for Side with Love, delivering goods, and communicating any pertinent information to Michelle and Loretta for the Newsletter, Weekly Announce, and Order of Service.

This is a wonderful opportunity to lift up and support local or national organizations that do work that is meaningful to your team or group. Sign up information can be found below.

[Side With Love and Shared Plate 2025-2026](#)

For the month of November, FUSIT's Human Needs Fund will be the recipient of the Shared Plate. The Board created this fund in 2015 to support those congregants who might need assistance with sudden short term financial needs such as car repair or rent payment. We are dedicating the month of November to replenish this important fund.

QUASAR for Mutual Aid Tompkins will be the Side With Love organization. Every Sunday in November we'll be collecting non-perishable food items.

Democracy Circle Meets on the Second Sunday

The 8th Principle Action Ministry (8PAM) has been gathering on the second Sunday of each month as a Democracy Circle to share ideas and companionship, engage with one another and educate ourselves and each other during this turbulent time in our history.

We'll meet Sunday, **November 9th** at noon in the Sophia Lyon Fahs Room.

We discuss actions in which we can engage and listen to one another. Any and all are welcome, whether you attend once or often. Please bring your suggestions, ideas and thoughts. Initially small groups were formed to focus on various areas including Engaging with Others, Engaging with the Community, Communication and Action and Constitution Study. We continue to evolve with our ideas and actions.

The Environmental Interest Circle

The Environmental Interest Circle meets to discuss/exchange ideas and actions that further sustainable living for each one of us, for the FUSIT congregation, and for our congregations' role in the greater community. We will meet on **November 5** at 7 pm in the Parlor and over Zoom, and continue to meet every first Wednesday of the month.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81644753524?pwd=SDBqQTN5eIM3ejltbGdlJeGhPa3QxQT09>

Meeting ID: 816 4475 3524 Passcode: 894885

Human Needs Fund

During this month of gratitude, how can we "pay it forward" to support someone in our congregation who finds themselves in sudden, short term financial distress? Is there a way for our caring community to help in a timely, confidential manner? It is that very calling that motivated the FUSIT Board to create the "Human Needs Fund" (HNF) in 2015. (To understand more about the history and purpose of this fund, [click here](#).)

Nancy Dolge and Walt Peck administer this fund as representatives of the FUSIT Care Team. During the last 12 months we have served 3 congregants for a total of \$1903.83. The HNF Fund is a separate checking account. Payments are typically for short-term needs such as car repair or rent payment. We have not raised funds to replenish this account since January 2024.

This year, we are dedicating the month of November to replenish this important fund. Please, [click here to donate](#) (choose Human Needs Fund from the first drop down menu. Alternatively, checks can be made out to FUSIT. Please indicate HUMAN NEEDS FUND in the memo. Mail the check to FUSIT OFFICE, PO Box 6, Ithaca, NY 14851.

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



Care Team

The Care Team provides pastoral care and support for congregants who are going through challenging times. If you or any member or close friend of FUSIT need some assistance, contact Kathy Hopkins at 607-582-3025 or Care@uuithaca.org.

Pastoral Care Emergencies

Please contact Rev. Janet Shortall at pastoralcare@uuithaca.org or 607-218-2088.

Care Café - November 2nd, 16th and 30th

Thank you for joining us for Care Café, held every other Sunday during the church year from 12:00 -1:30 in the Library after service and coffee hour.

The conversations we share during Care Café are rich, honest, and designed to offer meaningful insights about our journey through life together. The diverse personalities and perspectives we bring only deepen our understanding of how each of us navigates the challenges and joys we encounter.

I hope to have you with us.

As we look ahead, I'm reposting the dates to clear up any confusion.

Dates beginning in November:

November 2nd, 16th and 30th

December 14th and 28th

January 11th and 25th

February 8th and 22nd

March 8th, and 22nd

April 5th, 19th

May 3rd, 17th, and 31st

Rev. Peaches Gillette

Message from the Board of Trustees - How Does FUSIT “Work”?

Are you curious about how our Society “works”? How we keep the lights on and the building clean? How we pay the staff and raise the money to pay our bills? How we interact with the city of Ithaca and the state of New York? If you answer, “Yes, I am curious” then read on. If you answer, “Nope sounds boring”, then move on to the other articles in this wonderful monthly newsletter: “Ithaca UU Connections”. If you are still reading then ...

Think of FUSIT as two organizations. We are, first and foremost, a faith-based organization. We are members of organizations such as: 1) *The Unitarian Universalist Association Inc;* and 2) *ACT (Area Churches Together)*. Secondly, we are a nonprofit organization, subject to state laws such as: 1) “*Consolidated Laws of New York; Chapter 51; Article 19: Unitarian and Universalist Societies*”; and 2) “*New York Consolidated Laws; Not-For-Profit Corporation Law - NPC § 552. Standard of conduct in managing and investing an institutional fund.*” Sound a bit complex? Yep, it can be, but we have developed ...

Partnership Governance to organize ourselves. As a faith-based organization, we created the Ministry Visioning Team (MVT) to guide and coordinate the work of the ministry. And we created the Operations Administrative Team (OAT) to guide and make independent decisions regarding the administration of the church operations. Both Teams partner with the Board whose role is planning, setting goals, monitoring church programs and activities.

What has our nonprofit side done lately to make our Society “work”, or work better? A major accomplishment is the implementation of consistent staff job descriptions and related compensation. Our hard-working Personnel Committee used UUA-provided templates to tailor a system that works with a Society of our size and structure. Another accomplishment is applying for the legal status of a 501c3. That status is often required when applying for grants or to allow an employer to match a congregant’s donation to FUSIT. We’ve accomplished a number of other things over the past two years, and you might ask...

“Do I need to think about this nonprofit side of our Society?” Basically, NO. You can rest assured that the Board, MVT, and OAT are doing the nonprofit stuff that allows us to focus on our primary task of being our best as a faith-based organization. BUT, if you are interested in what and how we are accomplishing the nonprofit stuff then look up the monthly Board minutes on the website. You will find the improved Board minutes that now has a Table of Contents which allows you to quickly find the discussions and motions that interest you. But wait, there’s more! YOU just might be one of our members who would like to help with our nonprofit activities by volunteering for one of the partnership teams or the Board. If you are that person, don’t delay! Contact any member of the Board, or our Nominating Committee. Look for a Board member at coffee hour or address an email to Board@UUIthaca.ORG. And thanks for reading.

Fred Balfour, Board of Trustees

Stay Connected

Curious about events and happenings at First Unitarian Society of Ithaca? Check out our Facebook page and stay current with what's going on in the community!

[First Unitarian Society of Ithaca Facebook Page](#)

Office Hours

For the month of November, Michelle will be in the office Sundays, Mondays and Thursdays and working remotely on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. If you have in person office business, please send an email to office@uuithaca.org to make an appointment.

Soul Matters Material for November

The Soul Matters theme for November is *Nurturing Gratitude*. This month’s packet includes a few short readings, spiritual exercises, and discussion questions for you to consider. The material can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/SoulMattersNov2025>

November Board of Trustees Meeting

The Board is now meeting on the third Wednesday of the month and will meet on **November 19**, at 6:30 pm. Board meetings are a hybrid format, taking place in the Parlor and through Zoom.

All FUSIT members are invited to attend these meetings. Ten minutes are set aside at the beginning of the meeting for congregation feedback. Please join us! Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/88258776990pwd=VUxUTUMraVZDUUFQzQndSVFRaFlpDzo9>

Meeting ID: 882 5877 6990 Passcode: 602445

Gratitude places you in the energy field of plenitude. Perceiving life in a consciousness of gratitude is literally stepping into another dimension of living. Suddenly the seeming ordinariness of your days takes on a divine sparkle.

Michael Beckwith



FUSIT Finances #6

New budgeting and spending paradigm

The savings mentioned in previous reports are sourced from previous years when revenues exceeded expenses. These savings have for years provided a cushion when things happen in pledger's lives that impact their ability to make their commitment. And those savings funds provided our programming with some wiggle room when special opportunities arose.

For this fiscal year, we will all need to adjust our perception of church finances. Whenever possible, pledges need to be completed; and the earlier the better. Seeking and creating opportunities for new revenue sources like building space rentals and fundraisers should be on our minds. And let's brainstorm fund raisers that involve the greater Ithaca community. Similarly, supporting church programming with your time and energy reduces program costs.

The Operations Administrative Team has nearly completed a 501c3 application for our church, which, when granted, allows many opportunities for grant applications to be submitted. And 501c3 designation provides a pathway for matching gift employers to match your gift to FUSIT.

Don Barber, Treasurer



LGBTQ+ Group Meets Monthly

This Small Group is especially for FUSIT's LGBTQ+ community and meets monthly. ***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. Please reach out to Ely at eleanorwillard97@gmail.com for more information.

UUs of Color

We invite people of color (having African, Latinx, Asian, Arab, Middle Eastern, Native American, Pacific Islander identities) to gather with us. Our purpose is to commune with one another, amplify our voices, and promote diversity in our UU community. Activities may include having meals together, welcoming new POC into the congregation, planning a service, collaborating with other groups at (or beyond) FUSIT, and more. We meet the first Monday of the month at 6:00 pm and around meaningful events. Please contact poc@uuithaca.org for more information.

Expanding Community

For many this continues to be a time of increased 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. 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.

You're Invited!

Join us for a Newcomers Brunch

When: Saturday, **November 8th, 2025**

Time: 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Where: Parlor

Are you feeling like a Newcomer? Come enjoy good food, great company, and a warm welcome to our community. We can't wait to get to know you better!

RSVP by **November 3rd** to Sue Rakow,
sue.rakow@gmail.com or 607-351-6576

We look forward to seeing you there!

*Hosted by Sunday Morning Small Group: Sara Catterall,
Liz Einstein, Matt Hare, Kathy Hopkins, Margaret
Nichols, Sue Rakow, Carol Whitlow, Wendy Wolfe*

Women's Circle Meets on November 24

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

Join Us - Choir Season 2025-26

The FUSIT CHOIR is growing! Come join us. We rehearse in the church Annex on Thursdays (except holidays) from 7-8:30 pm.

Come sing for the Sage Chapel Candlelight service choir on **December 23!** Rehearsals start in November. Contact Jayne for more info and to register at choir@uuithaca.org.

Nametags

If you would like a nametag, please fill out the nametag request form at the Welcome Table or contact membership@uuithaca.org and we'll make one for you. Then look for your new nametag in the Narthex nametag cabinet (corner of Buffalo and Aurora Sts.)

Land Acknowledgement

*We acknowledge that our church is located
on land that is the traditional territory of the
Haudenosaunee People and the Cayuga Nation. Their presence is imbued
in these lakes, valleys, gorges, and hills. May we nurture our relationship
with our Haudenosaunee neighbors, and our shared responsibilities
to this Place of their homelands where we
mutually reside.*



Economic Justice



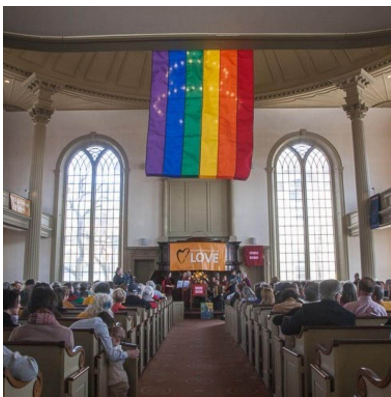
Environmental Justice



Immigrant Justice



LGBTQ Justice



Racial Justice



Reproductive Justice



What is love calling you to do? The world needs Unitarian Universalists to show up for justice with spiritual grounding, generosity, humility, courage, and concrete skills. It is a spiritual practice to choose love over fear, to be brave, to show up when we're called, to occupy space with loving resistance rather than fearful retreat. We are most powerful when we understand that all the issues we care most deeply about are fundamentally interlinked, and that each of us has a role to play in building a world in which all people can be free and thrive. When we bring our best selves to our justice work, whichever specific issue or campaign it might be, we are choosing to Side With Love. www.uua.org/justice

Joys and Sorrows

Joys and Sorrows are 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.

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.

Our Mission

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