



# The Forum



A Southwest Unitarian Universalist Publication

[www.swuu.org](http://www.swuu.org)

October 1, 2020

## Sunday Services

10:30 AM

6320 Royalton Road, North Royalton  
Join Us On Zoom!



### October 4

*Being Present When the Present “Stinks”*

This service explores Buddhist wisdom and practices (bodhichitta, tonglen) in the context of dealing with the daily distress(es) of our current times (pandemic, structural racism, political dissolution/authoritarianism) and still being able to move and contribute to healing.

-Led by Elizabeth Reilly, UU Church of Akron

Worship Associate: Mark Jackson

Focus Collection: Front Steps Housing and Services

### October 11

*LGBTQ Celebration!*

October is the time for many important LGBTQ awareness days. All are welcome this morning as we celebrate the diversity of gender and sexual orientation in our own SWUU community!

-Led by Rev. Megan Mathieson

Worship Associate: Ken Ellis

### October 18

*Listening With More Than Your Ears*

This morning we will enjoy a lively Pet Blessing service... virtually! Today it is fine for your cat to sit on the keyboard or for your dog to interrupt your attention. No pets at home? Bring your favorite stuffy to be blessed! All are welcome and all are beloved!

-Led by Rev. Megan Mathieson

Worship Associate: Jaret Gold

### October 25

*Can We Hear Each Other Through Our Masks?*

A friend recently said these are crazy times. Not only do we need to worry about masks, the economy, social distancing and rising death tolls – we also find ourselves concerned about people who think the pandemic is a hoax and that the administration is doing God’s work in bringing the apocalypse. Wow! How did we get to this point where we have two incredibly different views of the world competing in the same society? And yet we must learn to hear each other and live with each other – since it is highly unlikely that this is actually the “end times.” We will explore how we might begin to do this.

-Led by Rev. Joan VanBecelaere, Executive Director, UU Justice Ohio

Worship Associate: Dan Paxson

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## Message from your Minister

### Deep Listening

May the natural cooling of the seasons bring restorative energy to you.

2020 has brought challenges unlike any we have ever faced, and I have watched in awe as this sweet community has risen to meet and overcome each challenge. SouthWest UU is a feisty congregation that is bursting with love.

Robert Frost wrote about October:

*“O hushed October morning mild,  
Thy leaves have ripened to the fall;  
To-morrow's wind, if it be wild,  
Should waste them all.”*

In just a few short words, Frost tells us that while we don't know if each morning will greet us with mildness or a wild wind, it can be a comfort to know that we are entering the time of year when the “leaves have ripened to the fall.” That is to say that October is a time devoted to rest. It is a time when the leaves are supposed to fall, and we are supposed to pull our sweaters tighter around us.

As we hunker down in preparation for an Ohio winter, we do so in the sure comfort that we are together in spirit and in heart. We continue to find one another virtually, through the many groups and meetings of our beloved community. These can always be found on our website calendar. We connect to one another in a profound and holy way through our Sunday services.

If October invites us to slow down, dig in, take time, we would do well to listen. This time of falling leaves reminds us that we are invited to shed the unnecessary, to present ourselves authentically, and to show up with open hearts. This is what SWUU excels at. This is where we shine: authenticity.

I look forward to sharing worship with you on these mild October mornings that Robert Frost spoke about.

With so much love,  
Rev. Meg  
[minister@swuu.org](mailto:minister@swuu.org)

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## **Focus Collection for October: Front Steps Housing and Services**

by Debby Gorencic, Social Justice Committee

As of October 1, the Social Justice Committee will resume their standard practice of selecting a local not-for-profit organization to be the recipient of SWUU's monthly Focus Collections. For the month of October, the Focus Collection will benefit Front Steps Housing and Services (formerly known as Transitional Housing).

Transforming lives to end the cycle of homelessness is the vision of Front Steps Housing and Services. Their mission is to provide individuals and families who are mentally disabled and/or economically disadvantaged in Cuyahoga County with permanent supportive housing and lifelong solutions to increase self-sufficiency and independence. They realize their mission through safe, affordable housing; client-centered, comprehensive case management; and supportive services including life management, work force training, financial literacy and individual programs. Additionally, they are currently providing a Peer-to-Peer Crisis Support Helpline for individuals who are experiencing anxiety or a mental health crisis due to isolation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Focus Collection donations can be made through the Vanco Give Plus website or by mailing a check to SWUU at 6320 Royalton Road, North Royalton, OH 44133. Thank you for your support.

## **Urban Hope News**

by Jan Wehn, Social Justice Committee

Eleanor & Sara Davis, Debby and I packed lunches to take to Urban Hope on Sunday, September 13. We have started making Sandwiches which are greatly appreciated. The bags also included Hard Boiled eggs, Clementines, Rice Krispie Squares, Granola Bars, Cheese Sticks, and Peanut Butter Cups. We also took Vitamin Water which was a hit. We will be continuing this format as long as we can. Some of the visitors take showers and others just come for the bagged lunch. We have been making 30 bags each week.

Debby and I attended our monthly Zoom meeting with the Steering Committee for Urban Hope. It includes representatives from Westshore, the North Olmsted Church, and UUC. Each church has a Sunday, and if there are 5 Sundays, Jean Kosmac finds a group to prepare the bags. We learned two interesting things from the last meeting. The near West Side has a coalition of about 5 churches that meet once a month to fill in the gaps for needs for the community. Apparently, the East Side doesn't have any organized help for the residents. We also learned that the homeless population can use the following for addresses that will be accepted when registering to vote: West Side Catholic Drop In Center, The Cosgrove Drop in Center, Men's Shelter -- 2100 Lakeside Ave. Further information is on the Board of Election website.

Our next Brown Bag delivery is Sunday, October 11. Because of another generous cash donation, we are able to buy all of the food items, but donations of prepackaged foods or cash are always welcome! Thank you for your continued support. We are truly meeting a need helping to feed our neighbors.

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## Board Happenings

by Ellen Hansen-Ellis, Board President

It's hard to feel like you are making a positive impact on the world when you're sequestered at home trying not to get yourself or anyone else sick. Being isolated from other people is not the UU way of being; we need to be productive, involved, and helping others in order to "live our values". The SWUU Board has been affected by these challenges, just as you have individually, and our response has been to focus on more intangible things/actions that can still have a positive impact, either now or in the future.

At our September meeting, one of these intangible actions was at the forefront: how can we support SWUU activities that promote racial justice? As evidenced by the July e-mail exchanges on the SWUUList, this is important to many members, but we are not all of the same mind or in the same place on our journey towards understanding and reconciliation. Specifically for the Board, the question was raised as to whether we could/should put a Black Lives Matter banner on the outside of the church building.

The Board has reviewed all of SWUU's policies, as well as the By-laws, and believes that a path forward is identified in our by-laws. Section 8-F deals with the subject of significant ("Major") actions the church may elect to take. Here is the pertinent section:

*F. Some motions must be presented at annual or special meetings of the congregation because they are of such significance to the life of the Church that they may be designated "Major Actions." Major Actions shall require for passage a sixty-seven percent vote of the entire membership. Such actions would include, but not be limited to, the following:*

- *The calling of a minister*
- *The purchase of real estate*
- *Any other major commitment of church funds*
- *The taking of public stands on social justice issues*

*Voting shall be by secret written ballot using official ballots, with absentee ballots provided. The Board of Trustees by majority vote, or ten percent of the membership by written petition to the Board, may designate a motion to be a Major Action.*

The taking of public stands on social justice issues is considered a major action of the church because every member of the church must be willing to stand behind the action proposed. Even if not a proponent of the action, for whatever reason, they need to know that all perspectives have been heard, and that a strong majority of their community feels compelled to act. Hopefully this provides a way forward for those who may disagree with the action taken, since our commitment to the democratic process is at the core of our UU structure and beliefs.

With this in mind, the Board feels that the decision to place a banner on the building can only come after a special meeting where an organized, thoughtful discussion is held, and all opinions and ideas are welcomed and heard. As with all discussions around topics that may be potentially divisive or emotion-laden, special care must be taken for the discourse to be respectful and non-judgmental. After the discussion, a vote can be taken, with the required 67% affirmation needed to move forward with the action.

As this request has emerged from the congregation, the Board would look for a written petition signed by ten percent of the membership in order to move forward and plan this special meeting.

On a related note, many UU churches have recently adopted the 8th Principle, which was drafted by Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU):

*"We covenant to affirm and promote: Journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions."*

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Most of these churches went through a months-long education and discernment process before arriving at a point where they could fully own and adopt this principle. For those of you who have been around since the early days at SWUU, this process is similar to becoming a Welcoming Congregation. We may want to consider undertaking this work soon as a way to increase our understanding of and commitment to the dismantling of systemic racism. Please visit [8thPrincipleUUA](#) for more information.

SWUU has a long history of working through differences. We have been a remarkably healthy and happy group, and I attribute much of that to our commitment to the process of speaking, hearing, and being together in love. I look forward to seeing where this path leads us, and fully expect that we will embrace what is right and needed at this time.

## **Southwest UU History**

by Carol Jordan, Membership Committee

One of the important dates in SWUU's history is coming soon, the service to create SouthWest Unitarian Universalist Church. On Sunday, Nov. 8, 1987, 29 people signed the Membership book at a service in Zellers Elementary School in Strongsville. Sherry Spencer, Keith Mathews, Judy Newell, David Newell, and Laura Urbanic were among the signers. Three weeks later Ellen Hansen-Ellis and her husband, Ken, signed the Membership book, completing the charter membership at 31.

Keith Mathews recalls that his late wife, Joan, saw a notice that a committee was organizing for a UU church. She was appointed to a committee which worked through the summer. Since most of the potential members were not UUs, they met on Sunday afternoons to learn about the faith and plan for organization of a congregation. Joan started a newsletter; as the first editor she named it The Forum. The name continues today as our monthly newsletter.

West Shore UU Church in Rocky River was very supportive, Keith said. A West Shore member, Carl Kelley, and Rev. Craig Roshaven, an ordained minister who was on the staff at Oberlin College, led many discussions. Joan was elected to the Board of the church. Ellen Hansen-Ellis volunteered to play the piano. She later became a paid staff member, serving for 28 years before retiring in 2017.

As finance chairman, Keith led the first pledge drive. Jim Dunn, a member "of some means" as Keith recalled, donated \$25,000 toward the fund. By 2010 the building fund had grown to \$80,000 which enabled SWUU to pay cash for the current building. A member-supported capital fund provided funds for the renovation of the building, previously owned by the Masons. After Keith retired from Baldwin Wallace, he headed the search committee which selected Rev. Christine Neilson in 2002. He served as Board president from 2003 through 2005.

SWUU received a grant from the Unitarian Universalist Association that helped to pay for a minister for three years, reducing the amount each year as SWUU became financially stronger. Rev. David Cole, retired from West Shore, volunteered as the first minister. Other early ministers were Rev. Mary Grigolia, who is now at Olmsted UU Congregation, and Rev. Paul Beckel. Rev. Neilson served when the congregation met at Kulas Hall in Berea and in the move to the present building.

Keith says the church members joked that SWUU had grown from meeting in an elementary school to a middle school and to the college level at BW, and then graduated to our own home. He looks forward to celebrating the 35th anniversary of SWUU in just two years.

# The Forum



## Would you like to submit something to The Forum?

- ◆ Write as if the reader is new to SWUU
- ◆ Include first and last names, and area codes
- ◆ Include a contact person, phone number, and email if possible
- ◆ Include the city in which the event is located
- ◆ Avoid or explain insider terms and abbreviations
- ◆ Explain Who, What, Where, and When (How and Why are often helpful as well.)
- ◆ Encourage volunteering and participation gently.

Submission guidelines apply to articles and Order of Service announcements. Order of Service announcements may be sent to [office@swuu.org](mailto:office@swuu.org) by Thursday morning of each week.

Articles are edited minimally, only to ensure that these guidelines are met.

The Forum is published on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of each month

Submissions should be sent to [forum@swuu.org](mailto:forum@swuu.org) by the dates listed in the calendar of each issue.

The Board of Trustees meets once per month. Check the calendar on our website for the specific date. Everyone is welcome to attend. Minutes from the meetings will be available for members upon request to the Board Secretary.

## SWUU on the Web

For general information about SWUU, services, sermons, committees and the most up-to-date calendar of events, visit our website at:

[www.swuu.org](http://www.swuu.org)

## Receive The Forum Electronically!

If you would like to receive The Forum via email, contact

[forum@swuu.org](mailto:forum@swuu.org)

## Join the SWUUList

If you would like to join a newsgroup focused on issues of importance to SWUU, e-mail [connect@swuu.org](mailto:connect@swuu.org) and request to join the SWUUList.

## Sermons

If you would like to receive sermons via email or by mail, contact [office@swuu.org](mailto:office@swuu.org)

## Board Minutes

If you would like to receive the Board Minutes via email, contact [office@swuu.org](mailto:office@swuu.org), and put "Board Minutes" in the subject line

## Editorial Team

Dan Paxson  
Susan Paxson

# The Forum

## **Under What Conditions Should In Person Services Begin and What Will They Look Like?**

by Dan Paxson

Right now might seem to be the wrong time to ask these and other questions. However, if you think a bit more, well...maybe not. The truth is that we can't really just wait until all looks rosy before considering such things. There will not likely be a precise moment in the near future when the coronavirus is suddenly vanquished and our services instantly revert to their pre-pandemic form. The much more likely path is that the risk of infection will gradually decline through various mechanisms until it is below a threshold that is acceptable. Meanwhile, the treatments for those who are infected will likely gradually improve. As such, the answers to these questions may be a bit murky.

Given all this, and with the Board's permission, I am seeking to form a task force that will collect information relevant to these questions. The goal is to collect and synthesize the information, then provide a recommendation to the Board. The Board, of course, will have the final say on what we do and when.

Some of the questions that I'd like to try and answer are:

- What are the infection rates that federal, state, and county health experts consider safe for in-person gatherings?
- What is the state of our local testing and tracing relative to what needs to exist?
- Do we have an effective vaccine, and is it in wide distribution?
- What are other UU churches doing in our area?
- What is the UUA recommending?
- How does the congregation feel about meeting in-person?
- If some feel safe and others don't, how can we respond?
- Does the staff feel safe?
- If only limited in-person attendance is an option, do we consider hybrid services (some in the sanctuary and some on Zoom) or just wait until we can all attend?
- If limited in-person attendance is an option, how do we handle R.E.?
- Could in-person committee meetings be considered before in-person services?
- What risk-reducing precautions are necessary, and what do they cost?

My hope is to convene a group of 4-6 people for this task force. If this is something that you would be interested in helping with, I would be thrilled to have you join! Please contact me.

We don't know when we will meet in person again, but we do know that it will happen. The actions of this task force will hopefully help insure that it will be as safe, smooth, inclusive, and joyous a time as possible.

## **Membership Anniversaries**

by Carol Jordan, Membership Committee

The Membership Committee is starting a new program to recognize SWUU members who have reached five-year increments of membership. This month we are pleased to recognize Barbara Pierce and Suzy Matlack for five years of membership. They each signed the Membership Book in a service at SWUU on Oct. 18, 2015. Although we cannot be together, your SWUU friends send good wishes and are pleased you are part of our SWUU community.

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## **“Getting to Know You”** Interview by Susan Paxson

**Mary Ann McKeever** is one of our newer members. She had passed by the church many times and had attended UU churches before, so she decided to check us out on our website. The first person she encountered was Sue Davis, whom she called to inquire about our Wednesday Book Group. In addition to attending book groups, she now attends meditation and services when she can. She has found that being with like-minded people, UU philosophy and principles, and the open-mindedness of the members make her feel comfortable.

MaryAnn grew up in a Catholic family with her parents and her sister, Jane, who is two years older in East Liverpool, Ohio. She felt quite comfortable in the church and as a young girl even considered becoming a nun. When she went to college, she left home to attend Bowling Green, starting out in pre-med but changing to English because she loved to read and Chemistry didn't agree with her! During this time, she left the Catholic church which was gut-wrenching for her.

During her college years, she was an activist and so when she took her first job at Northern Illinois University, she had to adjust to the culture shock of being in a more conservative community. While teaching full-time, she was in a lesbian relationship which they had to keep hidden. She and Joy moved to Indiana where MaryAnn pursued her PhD in English. Unfortunately, partly due to her devastating break-up with Joy after 8 years together, she never finished her dissertation even though she had completed all of the course-work.

At this time, she moved to Wisconsin to teach at a 4-year college where she taught business writing classes to 40 native Americans from a Chippewa tribe who lived on a reservation called Lac de Flambeau. She was fascinated with Native American culture and spirituality and would sometimes spend time with her students after class. She said that in some ways they taught her as much as she taught them. Her interest in the culture led her to take a class taught by a fellow professor and counselor at the school who happened to be Native American, and even today, her house is full of Native American artwork.

Her next move brought her to Chicago and probably her best job, as a professor at Oakton Community College, where she chaired the English Department. Here she reconnected with an African American friend named Greg, whom she later married. Unable to have children of their own, they found themselves guardians of Greg's nephew, Corey, after he came to spend the summer with them because his family was troubled. Corey lived with them for 10 years. His teenage years were challenging due to his difficult early years, but he definitely bonded with MaryAnn. When his mom wanted to bring him to live with her, he cried because he didn't want to. Even when she and Greg divorced after 16 years of marriage, Corey stayed with her.

Mary Ann has seen her share of tragedy. Two years ago, a good friend died suddenly of a heart attack. Then, her beloved dog, Manypenny, died of cancer last year. Six months ago, after not hearing from Corey for many years, she got a call that Corey had been found dead of a drug overdose. But she is very resilient. She finds joy in gardening, singing and playing piano, painting, and especially spending time with her cousins and their children. Six years ago, when she retired after 40 years of teaching, she moved back to Ohio to be closer to them. As I am writing this article, MaryAnn is looking forward to getting her new puppy, Georgie, another Cavalier King Charles spaniel. She is going to be busy!



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## Sharing and Caring

**Pat Woodside** is home recovering from hip surgery after a fall last weekend. She is home now and mobile with a walker but slow and in some pain. Keep her in your thoughts and prayers.

**Herb and Carol Shroyer's** daughter, Melanie continues to be in treatment and is so appreciative of the thoughts, prayers, and cards on her behalf. Please continue to hold her in your hearts and minds for strength and healing.

**Sherry Spencer's** sister, Bonnie Banyard died suddenly last month and Sherry is in New York this week for a small service. Keep Sherry and her family in your thoughts and prayers during this sad time.

**Megan Mathieson** is home from the hospital and recuperating. She is thankful for all of the cards, prayer, positive vibes, food, and love. She appreciates our patience as she gets back to work.

**Dan and Susan Paxson** have found out that Katie and Jeremy are expecting their first baby next March. We are thrilled!

*\* send your joys and sorrows to [forum@swuu.org](mailto:forum@swuu.org) for inclusion in the next issue*

**Southwest Unitarian Universalist Church  
6320 Royalton Road  
North Royalton, Ohio 44133**



We are happy to mail The Forum to anyone who would like to receive it.