



# The Forum



A Southwest Unitarian Universalist Publication

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

March 1, 2023

*Daylight Savings Begins*  
**March 12**

*Spring Forward*

## Sunday Services

**10:30 AM**

**6320 Royalton Road, North Royalton  
In-Person and On Zoom!**



**March 5**

*Vulnerability and the Path to Connection*

As humans, we hunger for connection. True authentic connection requires us to learn vulnerability -- how to live it in ourselves and how to receive it from others. Join us as we explore vulnerability as a path to connection.

-Led by Rev. Ali Peters

Worship Associates: Ken Ellis

Focus Collection: Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio

**March 12**

*The Courage to Try: A Multigenerational Service*

In order to grow, we need to find the courage to try. But sometimes trying can feel vulnerable and scary! Join us for this multi-generational worship service where we will reach for this courage together.

-Led by Rev. Ali Peters

Worship Associate: Carter Porter

**March 19**

*Vulnerability in Moving Toward Wholeness*

How is vulnerability a part of the call to anti-racism and racial justice? Join us for this service that is a collaboration with members of the anti-racism task force.

-Led by Members of the SWUU Anti-Racism Task Force

Worship Associate: Rev. Ali Peters

**March 26**

*Embracing Selah*

This morning's service is inspired by a thriving nature preserve outside of Austin, TX, named "Selah, Bamberger Ranch Preserve." The man who dreamt it into being believed that each of us has a responsibility to do what we can to make the world a better place. Though not a Unitarian Universalist, his work is a model from which we can learn.

-Led by Rev Beth Marshall, UU Church of Canton

Worship Associate: Deb Celinski

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## Message from your Minister

### Vulnerability

Dear Ones,

Our worship theme for March is Vulnerability. How fitting it is for our February theme of Love to be followed by a month exploring vulnerability! Vulnerability seems to be a necessary ingredient in love's recipe, doesn't it?

As we shift our focus from love to vulnerability, I can offer you no better words than those of UU minister, Rev. Sean Parker Dennison, in his poem, "To Invoke Love."

#### **"To Invoke Love" by Sean Parker Dennison**

To invoke Love  
is to ask for a hug from a thunderstorm,  
spill tea in the lap of the infinite trickster,  
to make the biggest, most embarrassing mistake of  
your life in front of everyone who matters.

To invoke Love  
is to never know if it will come softly,  
with the nuzzle of a beloved dog,  
or pounce right on your chest with the strength of a  
lioness  
protecting her cub, her pride, her homeland.

To invoke Love  
is to take the risk of inviting chaos to visit the  
spaces  
you spent so much time making tidy,  
and watch as the breath of life scatters everything  
you have only just folded and put away.

To invoke Love  
is to allow for the possibility that your words  
and actions might become so empowered  
you can no longer believe in apathy,  
or the self-righteous idea that nothing can change.

To invoke Love  
is to give up self-deprecation, false humility, pride,  
to consider yourself worthy to be made whole,  
willing to encounter Love that will never  
let us let each other go.

To invoke Love  
is to guard against assumptions,  
take care with our words and practice forgiveness  
not as ethereal ideal, but right here,  
in the messy midst of our imperfect lives.

To invoke Love  
is to approach each day and every person with  
wonder,  
anticipating Love's arrival: "Is this the moment?"  
Is this Love's grand entrance?  
Is this person the embodiment of Love?  
Am I the one?

To invoke Love,  
is to play the fool, the one more concerned with  
loving  
than with appearance or reputation,  
the one ready and willing to be vulnerable,  
abandoning anything that gets in Love's way.

To invoke Love is to be ready to become Love.  
Here. Now. In everything we do. Are you ready?

Are you ready, beloveds?

Yours in faith,  
Rev. Ali

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## **Focus Collection for March: Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio** by Debby Gorencic, Social Justice Committee

The March Focus Collection will support Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio, an organization working for healthy bodies and healthy communities by maintaining 17 health center locations in North, East and Central Ohio. Their vision is "to create a world where sexual and reproductive rights are basic human rights, where access to health care does not depend on who you are, and where every person has the opportunity to choose their own path to a healthy and meaningful life". Their mission is "to protect, promote and provide empowered health care for people throughout Ohio". They are committed to the health and safety of Ohioans by doing everything to make sure everyone has access to the full range of reproductive health care including safe and legal abortion.

Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio is an affiliate of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Their services are designed to help people make lifelong informed choices that focus on responsibility, prevention of unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and reproductive cancers. They believe sexuality education should begin at home, continue throughout life and be fact based.

Donations can be made by check and placed in the collection basket or mailed to the church. They can also be made through the Vanco GivePlus Website. With the overturning of Roe v Wade last June and the ongoing attacks on reproductive rights our support of Planned Parenthood is needed now more than ever. Thank you for your generosity.

## **Urban Hope Visit** by Jan Wehn, Social Justice Committee

Our monthly visit to Urban Hope was particularly special because Debby and I were joined by Reverend Ali! She not only served and talked with guests but was also a masterful dishwasher. It was a pleasure to have her with us. It was a rather quiet day due to the warm temperatures and possibly the Super Bowl, but we stayed busy and felt good about feeding and socializing with our Cleveland neighbors. Besides a hot chicken casserole, there were hardboiled eggs, pasta salad, cheese sticks, chips, crackers, fruit, and delicious Valentine Cupcakes "Homemade with Love" from Angela. A volunteer from the North Olmsted church brought hotdogs, too. It is safe to say no-one went away hungry and they were also able to take the packaged items with them. Thank you all for your many contributions. Our next visit is Sunday, March 12.

## **Parking at SWUU** by Dan Paxson, Buildings and Grounds

We are thrilled to be seeing more people showing up for in-person services these days. But with that increase comes the need to remind folks about our limited parking at the church. The west lot is for handicap parking only. There are six spaces. Please do not park next to the church or in the cemetery driveway. We are not allowed to block access to the cemetery as per the city of North Royalton. The east lot has roughly 18 spaces; however, we try to reserve the two spaces in the southeast corner for visitors. There is ample parking at the bank, which is just to the west of the church. If you do not have mobility issues, the bank is really the best place to park. Thanks for your cooperation.

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## **Board Happenings**

by Mike Gold, Board President

Spring is just around the corner as we enter March. Daylight Savings Time begins March 12 and the “official” first day of Spring is March 20. Much of the weather this winter has already felt like Spring. We have also been warmed by some amazing sermons by Rev. Ali, stories for all ages by the talented team of Rev. Ali and Carolyn, original testimonials from our worship associates, choir appearances, individual musical performances and a concert by our pianist Marina’s amazing daughters, Sabrina and Dianna Kerze. Whether in person or on Zoom, Sundays at SWUU are not to be missed these days.

The Board has been busy working to achieve three major goals: Living into the 8th Principle, Promoting Volunteer Resilience via Gratitude and Boundaries, and Re-engaging Members & Community.

To meet the first goal, the Board will be presenting two items for the congregation to vote on in June. The first is a revised Land Acknowledgement that is accepted by the membership. More information on this will be forthcoming. The second is a vote on establishing a Racial Justice Action Ministry that will help us truly live into the 8th Principle. One of the initial actions we hope to begin now is an audit of our bylaws and policies. Other actions the Board is taking is building our social justice action profile in the community; participating in racial justice training; promoting social justice events; and, connecting with organizations working on social justice issues, like UU’s Together and Greater Cleveland Congregation. The Board has also begun reading and discussing the the UUA-sponsored 2020 report titled Widening the Circle of Concern. We are also sending two delegates to General Assembly in June, Rae Brewer and anastasia birosh, where Article II will be one of the main topics.

To promote volunteer resilience, we are trying to regularly recognize and thank all the people who make SWUU such a vibrant and happening community. So many in our small congregation contribute so much and for that we are all grateful. We are also trying to support volunteers who need to step back to recharge or take a break.

To re-engage our community, one of the big things we are planning is a Connection Cafe, scheduled for Sunday, April 2. Deb Celinski is heading up the planning for this event. The event will provide an opportunity to find out about all the groups and committees active at SWUU. We also hope you might find something you’d like to volunteer for. It will also be a thank you event to all the folks that serve SWUU.

SWUUSTories is another way you can participate in creating a living history of our church. Recordings will hopefully be available soon on the SWUU website. A signup sheet is available in the lobby.

The auction brought together all of us in a fun event organized by the Stewardship Team. A record amount of revenue was raised for the church, almost \$9000.00! Attendance was great and most all of the events and items offered got snatched up. And the survey conducted at the State of Church meeting in January has provided the Board, Committee on Ministry and Rev. Ali with valuable feedback on what you want to see at SWUU. Survey results are reported elsewhere in this issue of the Forum.

Finally, the Board is establishing a Safety & Security Task Force in an effort to ensure the well-being of our building and beloved people. Ken Ellis has agreed to head up this effort. You will hear more about this in the future.

There are many ways to help out at SWUU. Some of the things we take for granted, like Coffee Hour after service, especially need volunteers to keep that going. Thank you for whatever you can do and are already doing. Have a lovely Spring everybody and enjoy all the things you signed up for at the auction.

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## 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.

## Do you need to contact someone on the SWUU Staff?

Rev. Ali Peters (Minister)	(440) 305-0631
Mike Gold (President)	
Carolyn Stevens (Church Administrator)	(440) 877-1686
Carolyn Stevens (Director of Religious Education)	

### 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)

### Get Connected!

If you would like to receive The Forum via email, or if you would like to join a newsgroup focused on issues of importance to SWUU, or if you would like to receive our weekly newsblast, e-mail [connect@swuu.org](mailto:connect@swuu.org) and tell us which you want.

### 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

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## **Music, Poetry, and Art Sunday Returns!**

by Ellen Hansen-Ellis, Music Team

For many years, SWUU had an annual Music, Poetry, and Art Sunday service that lifted up the impact of the arts (and creativity) on our lives, and on humanity. This lay-led service featured offerings of music, poetry, artwork, and sometimes dance, from members and friends of the congregation. In some years there was a theme to unify the presentations, but not always. Either way, the service allowed anyone from SWUU to contribute to the spiritual life of the church in a way that was meaningful and empowering to all.

After a hiatus of about ten years, Music, Poetry, and Art Sunday will return on May 7th, 2023. The service will be coordinated by SWUU's Music Team (Lydia Avery, Ellen Hansen-Ellis, Katie Maslar, and Susan Paxson). In order for us to have a service, though, WE NEED YOU!

If you are a musician, a writer/lover of poetry, or an artist of any sort, we welcome your participation. The service theme for May is CREATIVITY, and this will also serve as the theme for our service. Potential contributions should be meaningful, suitable for a church service, and in some way supportive of the theme. Members of the committee can work with contributors to help guide in music or poetry selections, organize musicians, and address any logistical concerns.

Please consider being a part of this joyous and empowering service. Contact us at [music@swuu.org](mailto:music@swuu.org) with questions or ideas. We want you!

## **UU 101 and SWUU 101**

by Susan Paxson, membership

We at SWUU are so pleased to see new faces coming through our doors and returning again and again! You are welcome here. Would you like to learn more about Unitarian Universalism and this church? Does SWUU feel like a place where you belong? Are you curious about getting more involved? Are you wondering about what it means to become a member?

Two times a year, we offer a series of classes for people who might be new to UU or even people who have been coming for quite a while. In UU 101, we will share a bit about our spiritual journeys, talk about the highlights of Unitarian Universalist history and theology, and look at how our faith continues to evolve today. In SWUU 101, the second class, we will talk more about our congregation, ways to get connected, and what it means to be a member of Southwest UU Church.

We are inviting everyone to attend both classes. UU 101 will be held on Sunday, April 16th from 11:45-1:15 pm and SWUU 101 will be the following Sunday, April 23rd at the same time. These classes are offered by our Membership Committee and will be facilitated by Rev. Ali. Attending them is one of the steps toward membership for those considering joining, but it is also just a way of finding out more about us. If you are unable to attend this spring, this series will be offered again in the fall. If you would like to attend UU 101 or SWUU 101, please email me at [susan@paxson.us](mailto:susan@paxson.us) or call 216-543-9387. Also, please let us know if you would need child care.

We hope to see you there!

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## **Connection! Fun! Prizes! Cake!--Connection Cafe to take place April 2!**

by Deb Celinski, Vice-President

Plan to join us during coffee hour after the Sunday Service on April 2 for the Connection Cafe! This event will take place downstairs in our Fellowship Hall.

Not only will this event be your chance to learn how the different groups within the church support the mission of our congregation, but it will also be your chance to learn something new about your fellow congregants. And in the process, you can win some cool prizes! In addition, there will be a cake to celebrate the rich and varied ways that we connect with each other at SouthWest UU Church.

Groups within the congregation include:

Anti-Racism Task Force	Membership
Board of Trustees	Poetry Group
Book Groups	Social Justice
Building & Grounds	Stewardship
Caring Team	Thursday Happy Hour
Committee on Ministry	Women's Fellowship Gathering
First Wednesday Coffee	Women's History
Hospitality	Women's Group
Leadership Development Committee	Worship Team
Meditation	Zoom Team

## **Update on the State of Our Church Finances**

by Steve Doucette, Treasurer

At the midyear congregational meeting in January, I spoke about the state of our church finances. Since not everyone was able to attend the meeting, I am providing this summary.

First, I must say that the state of our church is great in terms of enthusiasm and spirit since we've returned to in person services. I think we all appreciate our wonderful staff and our Minister. On the other hand, the state of our finances is not as great. Like most not for profit organizations, we are struggling financially due to the damage from the pandemic over the past few years.

We are totally self funded; we pay our expenses with the funds donated by our members and friends. Prior to the pandemic, we were growing as a congregation. During the pandemic, however, our membership declined. It's normal to lose some members when they move, or other life circumstances change. In the past, we would also greet new visitors, who would become new members and friends. As you can imagine, it's difficult to greet new visitors when closed during a pandemic. Fewer members and friends result in fewer donations. And now that we are open and fully staffed, our expenses have gone up.

We expected this situation when we created our budget for this fiscal year that ends on June 30, 2023. We planned that for a period of time we would need to draw from our savings to pay a portion of our expenses. That is, we will run a deficit. Fortunately, we had previously put aside savings for just such a "rainy day," but obviously, we can't do this forever. The encouraging news is that we are seeing new faces at our services, and attendance is growing, but it will take time to rebuild. At the same time, we want to continue to work at reducing our deficit.

So, what can you do to help? You can help reduce our deficit by fully paying your pledged amount by June 30. You can help us by donating to our weekly collections either in person, online, or by mailing a check. You can help by promptly paying your auction bills. You can help with a special financial gift. I assure you we are very careful with how we spend money.

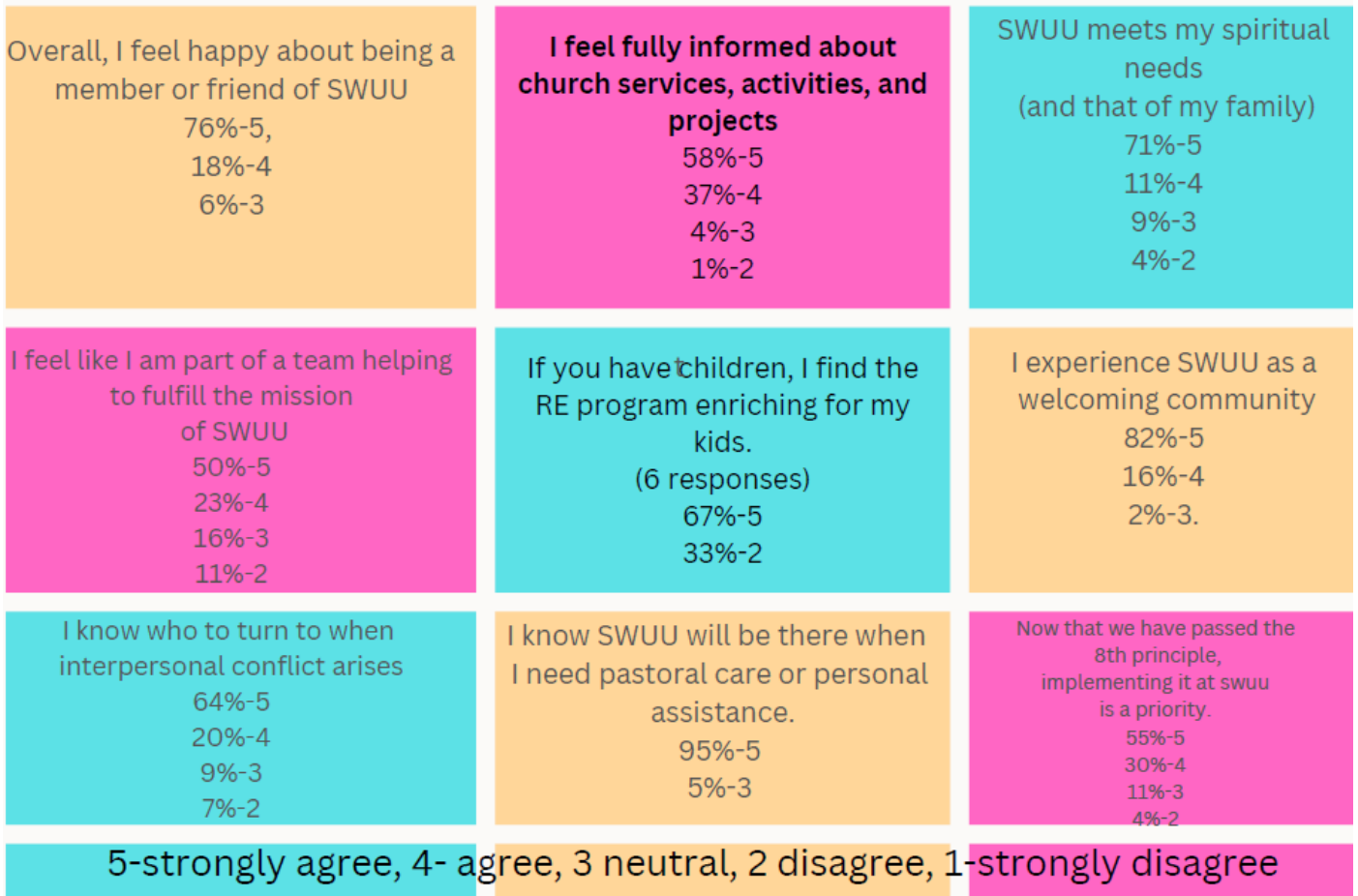
I'm happy to discuss this situation or answer any questions you might have. In closing, I am optimistic about the future, and I am confident that we will work through this. I thank you for your continued financial support.

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## Summary of Survey Results

Attached is the survey and some images of the results from the Pulse of the Congregation Survey conducted at the recent State of the Church meeting. The survey was prepared by the Committee on Ministry (Pat Woodside, Adam Miller, Leslie Van Kuren, Mike Gold), in association with Rev. Ali. The first graphic shows the results for the first 9 questions. The second graphic shows results for Question #10. And the third is a Word Cloud graphic with words provided by respondents. All the graphics were prepared by our Office Admin Extraordinaire, Carolyn Stevens.

### PULSE OF THE CONGREGATION- 45 RESPONSES



The responses to the last 3 questions are varied and intended mostly for planning purposes by the Board of Trustees, Committee on Ministry and Rev. Ali. Here is a summary:

- #10: Spiritual Growth was the top pick by most respondents. Fellowship ranked second.

Following are some of the comments to the following two questions:

- #11: In no particular order: Sunday services, our new minister, RE, pastoral care, fellowship, connection, inclusion, fun activities, music & choir, welcoming, Zoom and communication.

- #12: Again, in no particular order: more youth programs, more youth, more diverse music, more variety in services, bigger commitment to racial justice and engagement, more marketing, better Zoom, more volunteers.

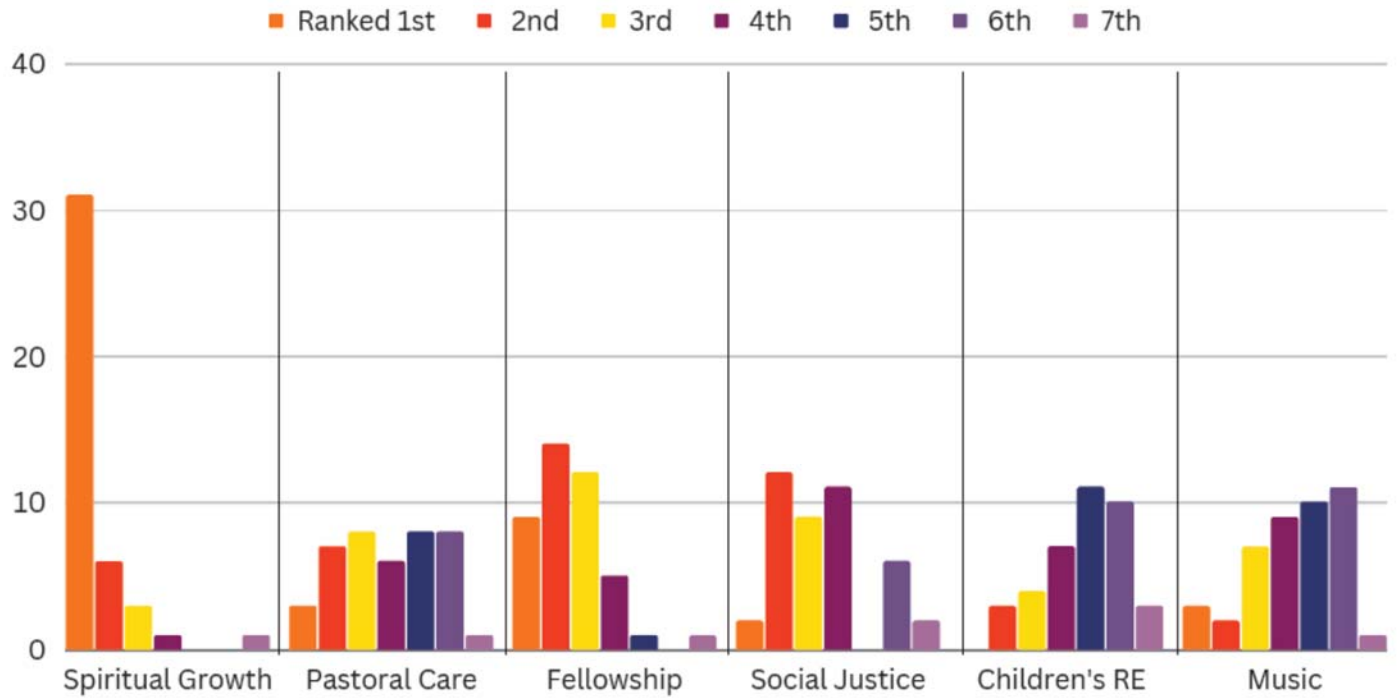
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Question 13 asked about skills folks might be able to offer, so many thanks to those that did respond.

Thank you so much to all who took the time to respond to the survey. Your feedback is valued and appreciated. Your responses help leadership assess how we're doing and plan for the future.



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### “Getting to Know You”

Interview by Dodi Lettus

This August, **Carolyn Stevens** will have been part of our church family for two years. Carolyn is multi-talented and highly creative. She is our Church Administrator, Bookkeeper, and Director of Religious Exploration.

Carolyn will be commemorating an even more important anniversary this year as she and husband Russ celebrate 25 years of marriage. They have two daughters—Laney, 21, and McKenna, 17—and two dogs, Izzy and Luna. Carolyn was born and raised Catholic but found her spiritual life enriched when her mom converted to Judaism after marrying Carolyn’s stepdad.

After working as a licensed optician and director of a daycare, Carolyn took a job at the UU Church of Akron. Within four weeks, she discovered that UU was a perfect fit for her. Carolyn is passionate about Social Justice work and wants to make the world a better place for her children. Or in the words of Dr. Seuss, “Unless someone like you cares an awful lot. Nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”

Carolyn manages a band called “Angie Haze” that started as a folk band but is now more into “creep pop” and focused on political and social issues. Carolyn also enjoys baking, is learning to make bread, and is also learning to be a beekeeper. She doesn’t have a hive yet, but her mom has five.

Her most memorable travel adventure was touring major European cities—Bratislava, Vienna, Salzburg, and Munich—with 42 middle schoolers to participate in a choir competition with her daughter Laney. The group sang in the great cathedrals in these cities. Carolyn describes herself as “not shy”, “big-hearted” and enjoys being a mom. Carolyn’s creativity, enthusiasm, and boundless energy have greatly enriched SWUU’s programming for children and youth!

Carolyn’s goal at this point in her life is to spread awareness about the importance of genetic testing to determine your cancer risk.



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### **Help us Make History**

Sign-up sheets are **now available** in the lobby to pick a time to share your favorite SWUU stories. There will also be a sheet of prompts to help you compose your story. Your story can be as short as you like and preferably not more than 10-15 minutes.

The Committee on Ministry and friends are sponsoring this project to record member and non-member stories for all to enjoy.

All of us have one thing in common: we feel connected to our SWUU community, and there are one or two stories or memories that really stand out to us.

Through the sharing of these stories, we hope to strengthen and celebrate that deep sense of community we all appreciate. There are options to provide these memories as digital audio recordings or written pieces, if you choose.

Each will be a meaningful personal reflection that collectively will create a powerful reminder of how SWUU has touched all of us in various ways.

Hopefully this process will be ongoing, making it a living repository of sorts, where we can all look back periodically as a way of re-engaging with our SWUU family.

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## Sharing and Caring

**Susan Paxson** is recovering well from her foot surgery. Many thanks to those of you who have sent cards, called, visited, brought food, walked the dog, and driven me to doctor's appointments. It really is helping me (and Dan) so much!

**Andy White** is still at O'Neill's rehab center in Middleburg Heights. He is off isolation and enjoying his activities and therapy. Cards can be sent to:

O'Neill Healthcare  
Andy White - Room 202  
7250 Old Oak Blvd.  
Middleburg Heights, OH 44130

**Sharon Eckert** is recovering from her hip replacement on February 27th. The surgery went well and she feels better today than the last two days. She will be staying with her sister for about a week, but then she will be home. Cards can be sent to: her home:

10976 Huntington Close  
North Royalton, OH 44133

*\*Please 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.