



The Forum



A Southwest Unitarian Universalist Publication

www.swuu.org

April 1, 2024

Sunday Services

10:30 AM

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



April 7

Liberation and Gender

What might our journey of collective liberation look and feel like when it comes to gender? Come this Sunday as we explore this question and all the beauty and possibility that exists beyond binaries.

-Led by Rev. Ali Peters

Worship Associate: Ken Ellis

Focus Collection: Stay-A-While Cat Shelter

April 14

Imagining Our Future

Being a part of a faith community takes imagination. What future can we imagine for ourselves, our congregation, and our larger faith movement? Come this Sunday to imagine together and to kick-off our annual pledge drive!

-Led by Rev. Ali Peters

Worship Associate: Sarajane Willson

April 21

In Praise of Dirt

As Earth Day approaches we honor dirt! Both the soil beneath our feet and the messy bits of life. Come this Sunday for an all-ages service that will include a dirt communion! For this service, you are invited to bring a little bit of soil from home or from some other place that brings you peace and joy.

-Led by Carolyn Stevens, SWUU DRE

Worship Associate: Dan Paxson

April 28

The Power of Listening

Listening is an essential skill for communicating with each other and navigating conflict. It is also a transformative spiritual practice. This Sunday, our SWUU Shared Ministry Team will lead us through a service centered on the power of listening!

-Led by The Shared Ministry Team-Mike Gold, Sarajane Willson, Ken Ellis, and Pat Woodside

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Message from your Minister Interdependence

Dear Ones,

Our worship theme in April is Interdependence. As you may remember, many of our worship themes this year are directly pulled from the shared values of our faith that are outlined in the proposed revisions to Article II of our Unitarian Universalist Association by-laws. Delegates from UU churches all over the country will be voting on this proposal this summer at our UUA General Assembly.

In worship so far this year, we've explored our core value of love, as well as other shared values that spring from this love – *generosity, justice, equity, and transformation*. In April we add *interdependence* to that list and in May, *pluralism*.

As we dig into this theme of interdependence this month, I would like to share how this value is stated in the Article II proposal:

Interdependence

We honor the interdependent web of all existence. With reverence for the great web of life and with humility, we acknowledge our place in it.

We covenant to protect Earth and all beings from exploitation. We will create and nurture sustainable relationships of care and respect, mutuality and justice. We will work to repair harm and damaged relationships.

Not only is this a strong statement of shared values, but it also feels like a prayer to me— how about you? Here is the prayer that I hear in these words. I welcome you to pray along with me, if you feel so moved:

Divine spirit that moves through all that is

Sacred love that binds, weaves, and ties all of us together,

Great mystery of many names,

It has been revealed to us time and again that we are not isolated beings. That we depend on each other. That we are a part of something bigger – interconnected within the whole of creation.

May we honor this interdependent web of all existence. May we acknowledge our place in it, with humility and with reverence for the great web of life.

Guide us and strengthen us, holy one, so that we may protect Earth and all beings from exploitation. Help us to create and nurture sustainable relationships of care and respect, mutuality and justice. Hold us in love as we work to repair harm and damaged relationships along the way.

May we intimately come to know our interdependence. And may our living and our being and our doing spring from this knowing.

May it be so and amen.

With love,

Rev. Ali

PS. I hope you will join me over the next couple months in diving deeper into these proposed revisions to Article II! This proposal is a big exciting thing in our larger UU movement as it works to get to the heart of who we are and what we do as Unitarian Universalists.

There are two upcoming opportunities to explore the proposal more deeply together through a 4-week Adult RE class! The first opportunity is on Zoom and the second is in person (both classes explore the same content – just pick which one works best for you!)

- Zoom Class: Tuesdays 7-8:30 pm on 4/9, 4/23, 4/30, and 5/7 (skipping 4/16)
 - In Person Class: Sundays 12:00-1:30 pm* on 5/5, 5/12, 5/19, and 6/2 (skipping 5/26)
- *Bring a brown bag lunch!

Email me for more info or to sign up for either class! I hope to see you there!

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Focus Collection for April: Stay-A-While Cat Shelter

by Nancy Peltola, Social Justice Committee

This month's focus offering will benefit our North Royalton neighbor Stay-A-While Cat Shelter. It is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to sheltering, caring for, and placing cats into life-long homes. It is a cageless, no-kill shelter that provides loving, compassionate, and comprehensive care for cats and kittens awaiting adoption. Many years ago our SWUU youth raised money for the shelter and many of us visited it. In 2021 they moved into a beautiful new building, but Covid hit their finances because they had to use otherwise earmarked money to finish it. They rely on donations and volunteers to stay open.

This non-profit operation is consistent with our 7th UU Principle: "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." Animals are indeed an important part of our lives! Please visit stayawhilecatshelter.org for more information and adoption hours. Your contribution can be made by check (made out to SWUU with Focus Offering on the memo line) and mailed to the church or put in the basket. Or use the Vanco GivePlus app. One check will be presented to the Shelter to support their local work. Your consideration is appreciated.

A brief reminder - on the first Sunday of each month (like April 7), any cash donations in the offering basket that are not earmarked for a specific fund will be given to that month's focus offering. Thank you.

Urban Hope Outreach Update

by Jan Wehn, Social Justice Committee

WOW! All we can do is express our gratitude for the very generous donations this month! Besides \$60 in cash from 3 SWUU members, we also received a great deal of food. Leslie made a delicious pasta casserole that was a huge hit, and we bought sheet pizzas to accompany it. Ellen made a huge salad which was also devoured. We also served oranges, grapes, hardboiled eggs, and chips. There were also donations of bars and other take aways which were all appreciated! Guests particularly loved the packages of instant macaroni and soup and small jars of peanut butter. And of course, Angela made her gourmet desserts. One of the comments was, "We never get anything like this." Thank you all for everything. Starting next month we will be receiving \$75 from the Steering Committee fund, and we are going to be able to buy special treats and some extras.

Nancy & Denny Peltola, Debby Gorencic and I served. We all agreed that'd it was a particularly special crowd. We estimated 60 guests were there, and they were so impressed with the meal. Spirits were high, and it felt good being there. Next month we will go on April 14. Susan and Dan Paxson will be joining Debby and me. Thank you for your generosity.

Cash Donations:

- \$20 SWUU member
- \$20 SWUU member
- \$20 SWUU member
- \$50 Steering Committee

Cash spent — \$164.00

(There was money left over from last month)

The Forum

Board Happenings by Rae Brewer, Board Vice-President

March has been a busy month! Our church has been involved in quite a bit, including a march in Columbus with the Poor People's Campaign earlier this month, and more upcoming events on the way.

This month, we have been exploring the theme of transformation in our services as a congregation. The SWUU Board is no exception. Following conversations with Rev. Ali, a Contract-to-Call Taskforce has been formed, led by Ellen Hansen-Ellis. As you may have heard in the homily Ellen gave recently, the newly formed Contract-to-Call Taskforce has begun to meet to assist the church with exploring our vision for shared ministry together, as we prepare to discuss hiring Rev. Ali as our settled minister. We hope you will consider participating in any surveys and meetings held to add your voice alongside others in this important conversation. While only members can vote in the congregational vote at our annual meeting, there will be opportunities for friends of the congregation to add their voices to this discussion.

With the full support of the Board, the Racial Justice Accountability Ministry has also been meeting with church committees and groups to explore how we can all lean into our commitment to the 8th Principle in our respective groups, and as a whole congregation. This is important work, and part of our commitment to anti-racism and diversity as a congregation. Please consider joining one of these discussions if you have not yet done so already!

The upcoming Article II vote this summer will also be another opportunity to consider transformation on a wider scale, as our faith community as a whole considers re-evaluating the way we frame and communicate our Unitarian Universalist faith. If you are interested in being a part of this historic vote at General Assembly, please reach out to myself or Rev. Ali.

As a Board, we continue to explore our theme of "Setting a Table for Community," our vision for an environment where all feel welcome, included, and nourished. We look forward to all these opportunities to come to deepen this conversation and envision this future together.

Re-Introducing The Shared Ministry Team! by Mike Gold

The Shared Ministry Team, formerly known as the Committee on Ministry, has some exciting news! First, we have a new name to better reflect who we are and what we do. Who we are is a group of four church members nominated by the minister and approved by the Board of Trustees. We are Sarajane Willson, Ken Ellis, Pat Woodside, and Mike Gold.

We are here to make our shared ministry as a congregation stronger and to help support the minister. We have five major functions:

1. To help the congregation live into our covenant.
2. To keep a pulse on the congregation -- what's going well and what needs attention?
3. To offer support to folks if conflict arises and to implement our conflict resolution policy if needed.
4. To provide a bridge between the congregation and the minister, bringing concerns or questions about church life to the attention of the minister.
5. To assess the state of our ministry and monitor the overall health of our congregation.

Finally, we want to thank outgoing Shared Ministry Team members Leslie VanKuren and Adam Miller for their many years of service. If you want to know more about our team or are interested in serving on the team, please contact Rev. Ali or any of the team members.

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GCC Action Tuesday May 7th from 7-8:30

by Susan Paxson , GCC Delegate

If you have never attended a GCC (Greater Cleveland Congregations) action before, this is your chance to find out more about how GCC works for social justice in our community. Even if you have already attended an action, we hope you will consider attending this one as well. This action is an opportunity to join with other GCC and community members in publicly calling for a more just and effective pretrial system- to reduce jail before trial. We will find out how the process currently works (or doesn't work) in Cuyahoga county, and how other systems have worked to produce more positive outcomes in other cities. The Pretrial Justice Team has been working hard to research this and all we have to do is attend and show our support and learn how things can be better! Ellen Hansen-Ellis and I will be attending and we are willing to drive others, as the event will be taking place at Olivet Institutional Baptist Church, 8712 Quincy Ave. in Cleveland. We would love to get one more driver who is in the North Royalton or Strongsville area. Our goal is 13 attendees. Won't you join us?

Plan to Join us for a Call Process Discussion

by Danelle Baker-Miller, Call Process Team

In our March 24 service, Ellen Hansen-Ellis introduced the call process to the congregation: the important work of determining whether Reverend Ali will join our congregation as our permanent, settled minister. Reverend Ali has taken the first step and confirmed her interest in joining our congregation long-term. Now we begin gathering congregational feedback to assess our position and to record our vision for the future of SWUU.

The Call Team will host ten opportunities for our congregation to gather and offer feedback on this important decision. Ali's fit for our congregation will be part of larger questions on how we define SWUU's ministry and our vision for our church moving forward.

Discussion opportunities are varied to accommodate schedules, transportation and mobility concerns. We ask that you review the options below and sign up on forms available outside the sanctuary beginning Sunday, March 31, or on the Google Forms link that will be sent out via the SWUUList or accessed by clicking [HERE](#). Each gathering can accommodate seven people and will last approximately 60-90 minutes. While we hope everyone can participate in one of these groups, those who are not able can submit their feedback via phone or email. Our goal is to collect feedback from 80 percent or approximately 60 members of the congregation.

During these gatherings, a facilitator will introduce a series of questions, and answers will be recorded anonymously. The Call Team will compile a final report and will then offer a recommendation to the congregation on the call decision prior to the congregational vote.

If you are a friend and not a member of the church, you are welcome to share your feedback via email or phone. Group discussions will be limited to members only to provide an open opportunity to share with other covenanted congregants.

Discussion Group Schedule:

Sunday, April 21 , 12:00-1:30 pm in SWUU basement	Sunday, April 28 , 12:00-1:30 pm at SWUU
Tuesday, April 23 , 2:00-3:30 pm on Zoom	Tuesday, April 30 , 10:00-11:30 am on Zoom
Wednesday, April 24 , 10:00-11:30 pm at SWUU	Wednesday, May 1 , 7:00-8:30 pm at SWUU
Thursday, April 25 , 7:00-8:30 pm on Zoom	Friday, May 3 , 2:00-3:30 pm at SWUU
Saturday, April 27 , 10:00-11:30 am at SWUU	Saturday, May 4 , 2:00-3:30 PM on Zoom

The call process is a significant time for our church. The work we do now will impact our collective future for years to come. Please let us know of any questions or concerns you may have as we embark on this process together.

Ellen Hansen-Ellis, Chair
Russell Allbery
Danelle Baker-Miller

Kirk Jusko
Cynthia Mondia
Sue Wraight,

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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 by Thursday morning of each week.

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

The Forum is published on the 1st day of each month. Submissions should be sent to forum@swuu.org by the dates listed on our website calendar.

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

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 and tell us which you want.

Sermons

If you would like to receive sermons via email or by mail, contact office@swuu.org

Board Minutes

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

Editorial Team

Dan Paxson
Susan Paxson

The Forum

Imagine Our Future!

by Steve Doucette, Stewardship Committee

Friends,

We're excited that the past year at SWUU has seen continued growth in attendance and enthusiasm. Our minister and staff are stellar. Our services offer thought-provoking sermons, top-tier music, and a positive energy that inspires the Stewardship Team to celebrate possibilities and **Imagine our Future**.



SWUU's annual pledge drive will kick off on Sunday, **April 14**. As a fully self-funded church, we are responsible for all our expenses, and our pledge drive is our main source of income. Gifts from members and friends support our wonderful services and enable us to maintain our beautiful building and continue the many activities we all enjoy.

As we've previously shared, SWUU's expenses have exceeded our income for many years, requiring that we rely on our savings to pay some of our bills. Our goal for the upcoming year is to end this trend, replenish our accounts and create a vision for a shared and sustainable future.

When you consider your pledge for the upcoming year, we ask that you remember the gifts you've received from SWUU and pledge accordingly. The Unitarian Universalist Association recommends pledging 3-5% of income. Please know we understand that not everyone is able to make a pledge of this size. Your participation, regardless of the amount, matters and contributes to SWUU's future.

Here are some upcoming dates to keep in mind:

- Pledge materials including pledge cards will be distributed before and after the service on **April 14**. We will mail them to you if you do not attend this service.
- Please return your pledge cards on Sunday, **April 28**. We ask that you return your card by mail if you can't do so in person.
- Pledge payments will support our church for the upcoming fiscal year, July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025.
- Pledges can be paid incrementally throughout the fiscal year: monthly, quarterly or on a schedule you designate.

Though we are a small congregation, we are abundant in both spirit and community. Your support makes all that we enjoy possible. Please join us in continuing to **Imagine our Future**.

We thank you in advance for your continued support. If you have not pledged in the past and have questions, please feel free to contact any of us.

The Stewardship Committee is:

Steve Doucette
Lydia Avery
Sharron Abbey
Danelle Baker-Miller
Sharon Eckert

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Women' Fellowship Gatherings

by Susan Paxson , Membership Committee

Women's Fellowship gatherings are a great way for visitors who identify as female to get to know other women at SWUU in a fun casual manner. All it takes is someone to host the gathering! In the past some hosts have invited the attendees to come into their home, in the church fellowship hall. You don't have to prepare the entire meal. Make it "pot luck" so everyone can contribute. Choose a theme and make the main dish and let me know the details so we can get the information out in the forum or at least on the swuulist. If you don't want to prepare food, you can choose a restaurant ; you would want to pick an RSVP date so you can make a reservation. It is a good idea to make sure they have a relatively quiet space to allow for conversation.

Please let me know if you are willing to host one of these fun gatherings which are usually on the fourth Friday of each month. Some folks who have hosted in the past are Ellen Hansen-Ellis, Carol Jagers, Edna Haugland, Valerie Hura, Susan Paxson, Sue Wraight, Sharon Eckert, Deb Celinski and myself. You could ask any one of them what was required, but it really is up to you!

We have not had a gathering for two months due to a busy church schedule and no host. The next scheduled gathering is April 26th. I hope to hear from you soon by text or email.

Earth Month EcoChallenge for 2024:

Conserving Every Ecosystem, Caring for Every Creature*

by Carol Thombs, Science educator and environmentalist

As Unitarian Universalists we have a long history of being committed to caring for our environment. Thinking about our impact upon our environment during this month of April leading up to Earth Day on Monday, April 22 we need as always to be conscience of our wise use of our resources: water, electricity, and consumer goods. Of high concern is our use of plastics. In truth, single-use plastic is unavoidable in our modern society. Plastic is the leading material used in food packaging; cutting it out entirely would be extremely difficult. For this reason, it is vital to reduce our single-use plastic consumption. Frankly, some of the single-use items are entirely unavoidable; however, single-use plastic bags, straws, and water bottles are optional. Take a moment and reflect on how many single-use plastic water bottles you have used this past month, or in your lifetime.

Have you ever considered where this plastic goes to after you dispose it? If every person on Earth used one single-use plastic water bottle that went straight into the ocean, an additional eight billion water bottles would be added to the ocean plastic crisis. Moreover, these 8 billion water bottles would stay in the sea for up to 500 years. Over time, these water bottles would break down into microplastics. As a result, these microplastics will be ingested by animals and potentially human beings. In truth, single-use plastic is unavoidable in our modern society.

OFFSET YOUR PLASTIC FOOTPRINT

Water Bottles: People who regularly drink from single-use plastic water bottles may consume an additional 90,000 microplastic particles annually. While doing this, you are contributing to the plastic crisis and facing the unknown consequences of consuming plastic. There are a plethora of alternatives to choose. Reusable water bottles or cups are the leading alternative that benefits our ecosystem. Switching from single-use plastic to a reusable alternative can benefit the ocean waters and marine life. By reducing the number of single-use water bottles you use, you are saving the environment and helping yourself against the unknown effects of plastic consumption.

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Bags: Single-use plastic bags have severe consequences on marine life in the ocean. For example, Sea Turtles unknowingly fall victim to ingesting plastic bags. Some species of sea turtle's primary food source are jellyfish. Plastic bags and jellyfish look very similar when floating in the ocean currents. As a result, the plastic bag causes digestive blockages. Plastic debris contains no nutritional value but carries toxins and pollutants. The good news is there are alternatives! Reusable bags are essential when grocery shopping and many stores even sell them at the checkout line for convenience. They can physically hold more while being sturdy and less likely to rip. Reusable and paper bags are better for the environment and can ultimately save an animal's life.

Straws: Single-use plastic straws have fatal effects on organisms across the ocean. Because they float, there are abundant opportunities for diverse wildlife to come in contact with them. **Plastic straws account for 7% of the globe's plastic waste.** This is alarming information due to the small size of straws and their unnecessary use. There are noteworthy alternatives to this issue, such as avoiding straws at local restaurants, using a biodegradable item, or using a reusable straw. Single-use plastic straws are unnecessary and have fatal consequences on marine organisms.

Utensils: These are commonly used worldwide. Single-use utensils are widely made from polystyrene, This specific type of plastic can stay on earth for **up to 1000 years** due to the unique materials used. Once this material starts to break down, it will turn into smaller pieces of plastic waste until it reaches the size of microplastics. It is estimated that more than **one hundred million plastic utensils are used daily in the United States alone.** This dense plastic causes a substantial amount of plastic pollution across the globe due to the inability to recycle it. Plastic utensils and food containers have been found to **release chemicals when heated**, like organic pollutants and endocrine disruptors. These chemicals can have negative effects, not only on wildlife, but also on our health. The good news is that single-use plastic utensils have so many great alternatives. Ensure the availability of reusable silverware. Bamboo or biodegradable single-use silverware is also available.

Take-out containers from restaurants provide us a way to reduce our food waste, but at the same time they add to our polluting of our earth with plastic/styrofoam. An easy solution is to have containers - yes, they may be plastic but not single-use to take into restaurants ready to fill with your left over food.

* Much of the material in this article was taken from 4Ocean.com.

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“Getting to Know You” Interview by Dodi Lettus

Eli Butler may be one of our newest SWUU members, but they are no stranger to Unitarian Universalism. Eli’s mother was Catholic and their father was a Southern Methodist, so the family made the decision to join the UU church in Westchester, New York, when Eli was five. Eli was active in the church and served as the youth representative on the church Board when they were in high school.

Eli values the way UU’s are welcoming to the LBGQTQIA+ community and the focus the church has on social justice. Justice has been a watchword in their life.

Eli went to college in Oberlin and moved to Berea last June. They are the Food Programs Outreach Coordinator for Oberlin Community Services (OBC). Their goal is to increase food accessibility in the community. A retired farmer in the area allows OBC to use his land. Eli enjoys working on the farm and being in nature. Another hobby of theirs is crochet and spending time with Peaches, their cat. Eli also enjoys swing dancing and traveling. They have visited the Alps, walked up the Eiffel Tower, been to the Arctic Circle and seen the Northern Lights and spent a semester abroad living in Stockholm.

Another area of interest for Eli is the fight to eliminate tuberculosis, which, although curable, is the deadliest infectious disease in the world. TB kills more people every year than any other infectious disease. They have joined with other activists such as TB Fighters, which is affiliated with Doctors Without Borders, in pressuring Big Pharma to lower prices of medication in countries where poverty creates healthcare inequality.

Eli says they are “loudly myself”. They are on the autism spectrum and may miss some social cues so they may sometimes seem awkward in social situations. They value the love and support of the UU community. One of their favorite quotes is from writer Kurt Vonnegut, “There is love enough in this world for everybody, if people will just look...the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.”

Their aim is to live everyday with love and hope at the center of all they do—a goal many of us share. Welcome to SWUU Eli!



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Sharing and Caring

Deb Celinski shares that, “ My pathology report came back clear and I am continuing to heal and I appreciate the all the cards and words of support.”

Cynthia Mondia is struggling with back pain. She appreciates your good thoughts and prayers, and cards would be appreciated as well.

Susan and Dan Paxson share the joy that **Derek and Leah** will be visiting with their 4 month-old, **Arlo** next weekend!

Pat Woodside is really happy to be recuperating at home after er recent surgeries and grateful for all the care and good wishes that were sent her way. She anticipates that the next (and hopefully final!) surgery will be in about a month.

** Please send your joys and sorrows to forum@swuu.org for inclusion in the next issue.*

Southwest Unitarian Universalist Church
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We are happy to mail The Forum to anyone who would like to receive it.