



April 7th ~ The Spirituality of Dog Mountain... The Rev. Canon Susan Ohlidal, Episcopal Priest & Friends of Dog Mountain Board Member. Stephen and Gwendolyn Ide Huneck devoted their lives to Dog Mountain, a mountain top farm in St. Johnsbury and home of the Dog Chapel and Huneck Gallery. The Chapel celebrates the spiritual bond between dogs and people of any faith or belief, its walls covered with thousands upon thousands of love notes to dogs, and memorial mementoes are made by the hundreds each season.

What draws people from all over the world to this mountain top? Why are these 150 acres of woods and fields called "sacred," "holy," "a thin space"? And what is it about dogs--these sentient beings--that so inspires and holds us?

Susan's priestly ministry has many expressions in The Episcopal Church and wider community. She serves informally as "chaplain" with Dog Mountain and can be found walking the trails, encountering dogs and their human companions, and witnessing the celebrations of those relationships.



https://www.cbs.com/shows/video/XYUjLZKMzr_6DG_7JVut1Eqmg7OkaAim/

April 14th ~ Freedom ~ Rev. B explores our growing confusion about what Americans mean when they invoke words like freedom, liberation, and democracy

April 21st ~ Spiritual Walks and Elevator Talks, Sarah Bengston, Worship Associate ~ When we gather at our meetinghouse on Sundays, each of us comes from a different place and has taken a unique path to arrive there. Today's service will reflect on the diverse spiritual journeys that shape our UU identities. We will also explore the concept of the "elevator speech," a handy tool for explaining our sometimes complicated faith in simple terms.

April 28th ~ Press Conference ~ It's your chance to ask Rev. B anything.

Minister's Letter for April 2024

Dear Congregants and Friends,

My April Chalice letter is a special challenge to write. As I sit at my desk writing in the last week of March. I'm looking out my window at the patchy dregs of winter. But even if April were to end with a last-gasp snowfall producing a similar or even whiter landscape, I know everything will feel fundamentally changed. Nature will have showered us all month with evidence that Life is fully committed to renewal.

With so much change heading toward us, I can't help but wonder if UUCStJ will also have its own case of spring fever. Will we be tempted to think big and reach out? Or will we prematurely shut down any dreaming because we know it's unlikely reality can match our imagination?

For example, some of you have heard me say that I think our Sanctuary decorations could tell a more powerful story about who we are and aim to be. I enjoy picturing some artful rearranging and additions to what's on our walls. If I let myself dream big, I can imagine replacing the massive cross on the east wall with something exciting to lift up our connections to the Abenaki on whose land we gather. After all, their name translates as "people of the dawn" or "sunrise people."

Maybe a mix donations and grants could fund a unique project with Abenaki artists to create a beautiful mural there; maybe that project could foster a relationship where Abenaki groups could be guests using our meeting room at times for their own programs and public outreach. (This is not to disrespect the Cross, although it may no longer be the best symbol of what we treasure about our Christian roots; if we retain it in the room, maybe it fits more naturally on the same wall as our symbols of Judaism and Islam, religions that share many of the same prophets and teachings).

Is it likely to happen? Perhaps not. Is it a substitute for continuing to invest in making our home more energy efficient and hospitable to those with disabilities? Of course not., But I invite you to envision something unique and remarkable because I agree with the painter Pablo Picasso's claim that, "The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls." We should be a congregation that celebrates art, whether we are talking about what's on our walls, music, dance or any other form of art.

I hope we can devote some of our April spiritual journey to the Path of Ollie. I'm referring here to a doggy hero of mine who had a brief moment of Internet fame in 2017 during a skills competition for British rescue dogs at Crufts, which claims to be the world's largest dog show. In case you missed it, Olly was a Jack Russell terrier who burst from the starting gate into a classic face plant at the first jump. He skidded and leaped up in a single motion, then took off on his personally chosen sprint path through the obstacles. No one knew where he was going next, least of all his trainer scrambling behind him. But Olly was obviously having a blast. If you clicked on the link, you heard the television announcer laughing so hard he could barely talk.

Olly's trainer said in an interview that Olly ran skills courses flawlessly in practice. But with a crowd to entertain and other dogs around, he got blissfully distracted. I sense lessons in there about the relationship between focus and joy – maybe they are like waves that often cancel each other out to some degree but peak when they are moving in harmony. And it relates to April if you experience it as the time of year when our Spirit says, "Make way for joy, even if you lose a little focus."

Love ya, Rev. B



UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY VIRTUAL GA • JUNE 20 - 23, 2024

General Assembly participants worship, witness, learn, connect, and make policy for the Association through democratic process. Anyone may attend; congregations must [certify](#) annually to have voting delegates. Check out this [Transcript for GA promotional video "UUA General Assembly 2024: Love Unites, Stories Ignite"](#).

<https://www.uua.org/ga>

From the Board

The Board of Trustees met on March 14.

During this meeting, we reflected on some exciting things that have happened since we last met. Francois Clemmons' concert and service on February 17 and 18 were both great successes. Rev. Barnaby is exploring the possibility of inviting him back in the future. On March 3, we hosted a potluck and panel discussion about the St. Johnsbury Food Coop, which was well-attended. We hope to keep up with further developments of this important community project.

In addition to celebrating our successes, we are looking ahead to our future. Our meetinghouse will require some upgrades in the coming months, including basement insulation, painting and siding. Meanwhile, Rev. Barnaby is contemplating the layout of the sanctuary. In particular, the wall hangings depicting sacred symbols could be rearranged to tell a compelling visual story. If you have a flair for interior design, Rev. Barnaby would love to hear your ideas!

Our annual pledge campaign is underway; thank you to those who have made your pledges already! We are asking that pledge cards be returned by March 31st so we can draft a balanced budget for the coming year. If you have questions about pledging (or anything else) please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

The UUCStJ Board of Trustees
Charlie Emerson, Treasurer
Jeffrey Perry, Interim Clerk
Sarah Bengston, Trustee
Jane Brickett, Trustee
Daisy McCoy, Trustee
Rev. Barnaby Feder, Minister

Musings of an Ex-Moderator, April 2024

For about thirty years I've lived by myself—alone but not lonely. Man is a social animal, and human beings through cooperation created civilization. The rôle of the historian is to resurrect the past; from the past we learn, or perhaps try to achieve, an understanding of who we were, are, and may become. For instance, I think Hitler's rise to power in the 1930's is pertinent to understand American political developments today.

A social group is beneficial. My community since 1999 has been this church, a church that began as a community of Universalists and later became (reluctantly) part of the larger UU world. We call ourselves a religion, but we've lost the concept of God. In looking at today's UUA leaders, I see no theologians, as expected, because without God is there theology? But thinkers exist, mostly on the Unitarian side, although Tufts University in Medford, Mass. was once closely associated with Universalism.

I'm aware of a few thinkers in the UUA. One is John Buehrens, 1947- . Well-trained in "theological" studies, he served as President of the UUA 1993-2001, following William Schulz and followed by William Sinkford—three respected intellectuals. Buehrens was known to me through his easy-to-read *Understanding the Bible, an Introduction for Skeptics* (2003). But now he enters my heart by means of his *Conflagration: How the Transcendentalists Sparked the American struggle for Racial, Gender, and Social Justice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2020).

Buehrens shows us in this skillfully researched and well-illustrated book that transcendentalism was spread in the real world, not just among a few odd folks in Concord, Mass. No longer can I think of transcendentalists as impractical philosophical intuitionists but see that some, at least, participated in commercial life and some had a salutary impact on truly significant social developments. This book is easy to read; and worth reading. I am proud to be a UU!

—D. Partington

Our April Donee - We are sharing our offering during April with Abenaki Helping Abenaki...AHA is overseen by the Barton, Vt.-based Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki tribe, but in practice supports a variety of needs for all Abenaki people in our region. AHA provides various educational resources to meet the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of the Nulhegan Band and other Native American students. It supplies community members with healthy food and necessary essentials in times of need. And AHA is educating Nulhegan Band citizens and other Native Americans on traditional, organic agriculture and sustainable food and cultural practices.

Former member of our congregation Estelle Burton recently passed away at Maple Lane Nursing Home. No memorial service is planned at this time.

The Caring Committee

The Caring Network is a small group that meets monthly to consider how we can be of support to members and friends in times of sorrow and concern, as well as how we can celebrate with you in times of joy. Please feel free to contact any one of us if you find that you or another member of the congregation may need a helping hand or listening ear, a prayer or simply a kind thought. Any information shared will remain confidential.

Jane Brickett (603-788-2220) silofarm@gmail.com
Brendan Hadash (802-748-8074) bhadash@sover.net
Joanne Giannino (508-577-7869) jojouw63@gmail.com
Rev. Barnaby Feder (802-989-9303) revbarnaby.stj@gmail.com

