

Fall 2014

Crossings

*The Magazine of the Unitarian Universalist Church
at Washington Crossing*



Rolling Up Her Sleeves

Rev. Kim Wildszewski on
the Joy of Our Work Ahead

Why They Ride

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Path of Courage

UUCWC's Early Years as a Welcoming Congregation



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CROSSINGS: OUR PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

Articles in *Crossings* focus on the positive work done by UUCWC members and friends that demonstrates our congregation's commitment to the [7 Principles](#). Many good works by our committees, teams, and individuals are inspirational. Unless you are intimately involved with these efforts, however, you may not be aware of the time and selfless dedication, the challenges overcome, or the joy experienced by those involved — not to mention the impact on those who benefit from their work. By telling our stories, we hope to inspire even greater engagement in social justice, charity, and other positive efforts within UUCWC.

UUCWC MISSION STATEMENT

Inspired by our Principles and Purposes, members of the Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing unite to create a welcoming, caring religious community. Within this community, we encourage and affirm the individual's quest for authenticity, wisdom and spiritual deepening. We gather to celebrate the wonder of the cosmos and the mystery of life, its passages, its joys and sorrows. Compelled by justice, we give voice to societal concerns and reach out to touch the lives of others.

Crossings

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Unitarian Universalist Church
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Join the Journey.
Open to You.

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Our church is a Welcoming Congregation where people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning can participate authentically and fully.



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Each summer, two UUCWC members demonstrate our UU Principles beyond our walls by pedaling in the 500-mile Anchor House Ride for Runaways. There are easier ways to support a social justice cause and to live UUCWC's mission — so what makes George Desser and Ben Thornton do it?

8 We Built the Bandwagon

As more and more states remove barriers to same-sex marriage, at long last we may have reached a national tipping point on one more issue of equality. One short generation ago, it took a great deal of courage to express public support for GLBT equality. In those days, UUCWC was there — becoming an early UUA Welcoming Congregation. We didn't just jump on the bandwagon.

14 Q&A: Rev. Kim Wildszewski

In a wide-ranging interview, UUCWC's 10th settled minister reflects on the challenges of being in community, shares her views on congregational growth, and expresses a clear idea of how to engage with members in taking UUCWC into its second century.

Cover photo by Mike Dalzell

Why They *Ride*

Each July, two UUCWC members test their endurance to support Anchor House, pedaling in the 500-mile Ride for Runaways. There are easier ways to support a social justice cause and to live UUCWC's mission — so what makes George Desser and Ben Thornton do it?

Story by Richard DiGeorgio

*W*hy would anyone get up before dawn most mornings and bicycle a dozen or more miles before even going to work? Just for the privilege of sweating out one grueling week on a bike in the sweltering heat of July?

This question first came to my attention a few years ago. At the time, some members of our congregation asked UUCWC's [Council for Faith in Action](#) (see box on page 7) for sponsorship donations for [Anchor House](#), which provides emergency housing, food, clothing, and hope for hundreds of runaway, homeless, and abused children each year in the Trenton area. An annual fundraiser, the 500-mile [Anchor House Ride for Runaways](#), benefits its programs.

OK, but it's a lot easier just to write a check and be done with it. Why would you put yourself through the physical torture? This is the mystery I set out to unravel.

Maybe they do this to see some great scenery?

This seemed like a viable theory. So I asked UUCWC members George Desser and Ben Thornton, who have participated in the Anchor House ride for several years, to show me what one might have seen on this year's ride, which wound through Appalachian Mountain chains and river valleys from Lexington, Va. to Trenton. As you'll see in the photo at left, yes, you might soak in some great scenery on one of these rides.

But the route changes each year (last year's ride to Trenton started in Burlington, Vt.). Could the scenery just have been a fluke this year? Kathy Drulis, director of operations for the Anchor House Foundation and who has chaired the ride for

Near the end of this year's event, George Desser and the other riders gather at Hopewell Valley High School before the final sprint to the finish line, Quaker Bridge Mall.

many years, cleared that up — no, it's no fluke, she says. A planning committee starts a year ahead of time to map out a beautiful ride each year. If you need a change of scenery and want to be up close with what nature does best, this is one way to do it.

Maybe they need a cheap planned vacation?

The route is specially designed so that hotels are available every 60 to 80 miles for the 200-plus riders and support crew. Planning a route with adequate accommodations along the way is no easy task, given the size of the group and the rural roads taken to get back to Trenton. Overnight accommodations are provided at no cost to riders. There's a free banquet meal one night during the weeklong ride, but otherwise you'll have to buy your own food each day.

But there are no transportation costs and none of those pesky baggage fees; your gear and supplies are trucked for you to the starting point 500 miles





The 2014 Anchor House Ride for Runaways weaved through mountains and valleys from Virginia to Maryland. At some points, mountain climbs topped altitudes of 2,000 feet..



Ben Thornton shows off his gear in one of his first rides for Anchor House.

away, and Anchor House even provides a bus for you to get to the starting gate. Should you get a flat tire while you are riding your 60-plus miles per day, people in rover cars will come by and fix it for you. They'll even give you water so *you* don't go flat. So maybe there is some truth to the notion that it's a cheap planned vacation.

Maybe they need some kind of bonding experience?

You'd think that once you have done this, that would be enough. But noooo — some of the riders have done this for more than 25 years. Many do it year in and year out. Some even do it with their kids, once the children are old enough. Both Ben and George have done this for five years now.

It's not just a summer experience. Activities begin when riders get together for a video party in November and continue up through the ride in July. These activities form a volunteer network that helps Anchor House get all sorts of things done. Friendships are formed and one-on-one bonding takes place as enthusiasm builds all year for the event.

Kathy gives credence to this theory, saying that for Anchor House personnel to participate as riders, they have to get permission. So many employees are interested in participating, she says, there is concern about having enough staff around to fulfill Anchor House's mission during the week of the ride.

Still, I can think of lots of ways to bond, get a planned vacation relatively cheaply, and see some great scenery without getting up most mornings at the crack of dawn and riding as many as 50 miles a day. Something else has to be going on here. What could that be?

Maybe it's a way to improve your health?

I asked George Desser about this theory. George, for one, does this to stay healthy. George has type 2 diabetes and finds that the rigors of biking help keep him healthy. Anchor House riders are encouraged to log 1,200 to 1,500 miles on a bicycle from the end of February until the ride — roughly 10 to 12 miles per day. George does much more "road work," riding 18 to 22 miles before going to work most mornings and 50 to 70 miles a day on the weekend. "The ride does not get any easier each year, but at least you know what to expect," he says.

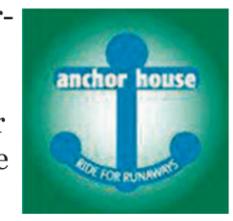
George believes that riding is equally beneficial to his

physical health as it is to his mental health. "Instead of meditating," George says, *I peditate.*"

Ben also uses bicycling as his primary means of exercise. Given his young family — a wife and three young children — it is not always easy to put in the miles each day.

Maybe it's because Anchor House is a worthy cause?

Founded in 1978, Anchor House operates several programs. Its best-known program may be Anchor House Shelter, a 24-hour program that provides emergency shelter and crisis-stabilization services for run-away, at-risk, and homeless youths age 10 to 17. The analogy of an anchor keeping a ship safe during a storm is a good one; Anchor House is there to help youths through a crisis in their life, to find safe haven until the storm is over. Its other programs include [Angel's Wings](#), a 30-day respite-care home for children up to 12 years old; a street outreach program; and transitional living and permanent housing programs for young adults age 18 to 21.



Of course, to support such activities, you need funding. The first ride — in 1978 from Jacksonville, Fla., to Trenton — was led by Joe Yuhas, a local freeholder, and raised \$10,000. Last year's ride ([watch highlights here](#)) raised more than \$580,000. This year's ride probably will top that when all the money is accounted for.

Maybe there is some sort of personal fulfillment a rider gains from participation?

Kathy is the only paid Anchor House employee involved in planning and executing each year's ride. *Riders* spend thousands of volunteer hours planning and pulling off each year's ride.

Some people engage in the rides as sport, for the physical challenge, or to try to improve on their times each year. But for Ben, "It is more of a spiritual experience and related to the purpose of Anchor House." The ride brings Ben great joy, which he says "is multiplied by the great joy I receive when I am welcomed home by my family after seven challenging days on the bike in really hot weather."

George too, feels pride in being able to physically endure the ride. Even with all of the training he does, 500 miles in a week is no easy feat; your endurance can fluctuate from one day to the next, and 500 miles are particularly hard on your seat. This year, George got his 5-year plaque and a T-shirt signifying his participation, which he wears with pride.

Maybe it's all of the above.

On further reflection, it seems that many of these reasons come into play for those who participate in the Anchor House Ride. When you consider all of the reasons for riding, it's not hard to understand why people ride again and again — and encourage others to do it as well. Ben recruited George and has the commitment of two firemen he works with to do next year's ride. Maybe you, too, know someone who would enjoy this unique experience.

Regardless of whether we ride or cheer on the riders, we can all feel some small part in the ride's success through our giving as a congregation and through individual contributions that sponsor riders from our own congregation.

RICH DIGEORGIO is a professional change management consultant and has been a member of UUCWC since 2005.

CFA: The bridge between UUCWC and Anchor House

Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing shares 50% of plate collections from Sunday Services with local organizations whose work is compatible with UUCWC's mission and vision. Anchor House is one of the beneficiaries selected by the Council for Faith in Action (CFA) to receive a portion of plate donations.

CFA facilitates UUCWC's commitment to be a force for justice, equity, and compassion, encouraging our faith community to manifest change through education, directed giving, social witness, advocacy, and direct action in our communities. Using criteria that encompass UUCWC's mission and vision statements and our [UU principles](#) and values, CFA evaluates proposals for social justice projects and funding requests from external organizations and causes. CFA manages the portion of plate collections that UUCWC dedicates to this aspect of its ministry.

WALKING A COURAGEOUS PATH

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” In the late 1980s and early 1990s, UUCWC forged a path of love in the face of bigotry, becoming one of the UUA’s first Welcoming Congregations. In those early days and in the years since, we’ve learned that being inclusive of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities is not a one-time exercise. It requires continual recommitment.

First of two parts

Story by *Phyllis Warren*

Photos courtesy of the *UUCWC Archives*

Here at Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing, we are justly proud of our history as being one of the first five congregations in the country to be designated a “[Welcoming Congregation](#)” by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). The Welcoming Congregation plaque in our lobby (page 9, center) stands as tangible proof of our commitment to furthering the vision it represents. Yet other than a handful of long-time members, how many of us know what that designation really means, how it came about, and what it calls us to be?

Until I began researching this issue, I had no idea of the trajectory that preceded, led to, and followed our designation as a Welcoming Congregation. The details of this part of our history are fascinating in their own right and are a reflection of the changes that have taken place in the UUA and in our society as a whole. This two-part article proposes to place our congregation on the GLBT map — to show how our church has not only *talked* the talk over the years but also has consistently *walked* the talk in advanc-

ing awareness of, and combating the discrimination against, GLBTQ people and the prejudice that arises from discrimination.

Part 1, published in this issue of *Crossings* to coincide with October’s [LGBT History Month](#), describes the courage this congregation displayed in making choices that one short generation ago were not consistent with popular sentiment. In hindsight, becoming one of the first UUA congregations to take intentional steps to welcome people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) to participate meaningfully in worship was a natural decision. In truth, an authentic and unified decision required that we, too, do some hard work. In Part 2, which will be published in the Winter issue, we’ll examine why continual introspection and re-examination are important for consistently walking, and not just talking, the talk.

Progress takes decades

Discussing UUCWC’s involvement in GLBT issues cannot be done without first seeing the issues from a broader perspective. For example,

consider the following national events:

- In 1966, the world’s first the transgender organization, the National Transsexual Counseling Unit, was established in San Francisco.
- In 1969, the [Stonewall riots](#), in which patrons of a gay bar in New York’s Greenwich Village fought back during a police raid, transformed the gay-rights movement from one that was limited to a small number of activists into a widespread protest for equal rights and acceptance.
- In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official list of mental disorders.

And even from the more limited perspective of the UUA, consider that:

- A 1967 UUA survey found that 8% of members believed that homosexuality should be discouraged by law and 30% believed homosexuality should be discouraged by education. Only 12% believed it should not be discouraged by either (and 0.1% believed it should be encouraged).
- In 1970, the UUA General Assembly (GA) passed a resolution to end discrimination against gays and bisexuals. GA also called on congregations to develop sex-education programs that promote health attitudes towards all forms of sexuality.
- In 1987, the UUA established the Common Vision Planning Committee. This committee found “many negative attitudes, deep prejudices, and profound ignorance about bisexual, gay, and lesbian people [that] resulted in the exclusion of bisexual, gay, and lesbian people from their churches.”

As a result of these findings, the delegates at the 1989 UUA GA voted overwhelmingly to initiate the [Welcoming Congregation Program](#) to educate its members. Each congregation adopts the program in a way that best meets its own goals, recognizing that each unique situation can bring positive changes to individuals and congregations. Consisting of workshops for congregations that see a need to become more inclusive towards bisexual, gay lesbian and/or transgender people, the Welcoming Congregation Program is voluntary. Today, 66% of U.S. UU congregations and 94% of Canadian UU congregations have completed the steps necessary to earn UUA recognition as a Welcoming Congregation.

Building awareness at UUCWC

Building awareness at UUCWC

Our own history toward becoming a Welcoming Congregation begins in 1987, when UUCWC’s then-minister, Peter Jenkins, and congregant Bob Griffiths formed a group to address gay and lesbian needs. At the time, although UUCWC had no members who were openly gay or lesbian, UUCWC became a part of the national UUA movement to acknowledge the inherent worth and dignity of GLBT people and to fight against discrimination

against this population, especially in relation to the horrendous treatment of persons with AIDS; to recognize the value and dignity of same-sex relationships; and ultimately, to achieve legal recognition of same-sex marriage in our area. A number of straight members joined the group.

Numerous discussions took place in which congregants talked about their life experiences, fears, and hang-ups and began to work through various issues arising from homophobia. During this time, a



member named Wendy Lucas came out as lesbian during a Sunday service. Long-time congregant and 1980s Board President Ruth Samsel admiringly describes Wendy as one of the early “I-couldn't-care-less-what-you-think” people.

By then, Ruth and her partner, Barbara Livingstone, had established the Working Group for Gay and Lesbian Issues (WGGLI), holding the first meeting in their home in 1988. Composed of several gay, lesbian, and straight allies from UUCWC, the group began to evaluate congregational attitudes and recommended activities and educational programs. The board acknowledged the group, first as a social committee, and later, in 1991, as a standing committee.

In 1989, WGGLI held a successful homophobia workshop for church leaders and participated in a march to support AIDS victims. A series of internal educational activities followed. Through the efforts of WGGLI, the congregation engaged in some deep soul-searching — a process that wasn't always easy. A few members who decided this wasn't for them left UUCWC.

But in the end, love prevailed. In August 1991, UUCWC became the one of the first churches in the nation to be officially designated a Welcoming Congregation.

Early years as a Welcoming Congregation

Initial efforts at UUCWC were focused on counteracting the shame, isolation, social and familial ostracism, and fear that many gay and lesbian people experienced. Just coming out was a major challenge, compounded by the fact that there was no

legal protection for employees who were threatened with or who experienced job loss because of discrimination based on real or perceived sexual orientation.

Among the first orders of business at UUCWC was to develop “welcoming words” — those that are read from the pulpit at the start of each service. When a draft of welcoming words was being reviewed by the congregation, many people questioned why GLBT people were specifically singled out for mention while many other groups that are discriminated against were not. The answer to this question can be found in an [Interweave](#) publication [“Welcoming Congregation,” a publication of the UUA Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns] from our archives that addresses this very issue. While many different populations (whether it be the physically or mentally challenged, immigrants, or any category of people who are perceived as “different from” or “less than” others) do not feel welcomed by mainstream religions or society as a whole, sexual minorities are in a unique position in that they are the only group whom theology or biblical authority historically have specifically identified and condemned:

Why *just* Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and/or Transgender? ... The Rev. David Morgan Strong probably states it best in the Welcoming Congregation Manual: “For centuries, the church has been a leading force against sexual minorities. It is not surprising that gay people are reluctant to reach to the very institution that oppresses them. Yet gay, lesbian, [trans-

gender], and bisexual people have no less need for warmth, caring, and affirmation than anyone else who calls the liberal church their religious home.

In 1992, WGGLI changed its name to WGGLBI (Welcoming Group for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Individuals) to include bisexuals. Group members served as consultants to other churches interested in becoming a Welcoming Congregation, such as Lincroft, East Brunswick, and Cherry Hill. Over the years, members conducted church services, marched on Washington regarding AIDS and in the Asbury Park Gay Pride Day, conducted seminars, provided guest speakers, held Adult Religious Education classes, developed a survey of attitudes, showed documentaries, and held a number of meetings of PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) for youth at the church. In addition, it hosted dances, brunches, coffee houses, and potluck suppers, and it engaged with other local groups such as [HiTops](#) (which provides health services and sex education) and [Rainbow House](#) (which provides residential, counseling, and other services to GLBTQ youth). It also held “Gaymes Night.” Members of the group wore and encouraged others to wear the [pink triangle](#) — by bumper sticker, T-shirt, or pin — to commemorate and express their solidarity with homosexuals who perished in the Holocaust.¹ “This was a particularly action-motivated group of gay and straight congregants who participated in the years from 1988 to 2000,” says Ruth.

All of WGGLBI's activities were geared toward educating and celebrating and creating awareness of the needs and issues of sexual minorities. In 1992, a group of UUCWC writers met to write about their individual experiences as lesbians. Outreach efforts to gay men were made through the distribution of fliers in the community.

That same year, WGGLBI held the first of three annual lay-led services. Part of the service included the congregation reciting the following words:

¹ In addition to Jews, gypsies, and the mentally retarded, Nazis targeted homosexual men and women for extinction; while Jews were forced to wear a yellow star, gay men had to wear a pink triangle and lesbians had to wear a black triangle. Today the pink triangle has become a symbol of pride and liberation to remind people of the oppressions that gay and lesbian people have suffered and to signal their refusal to be silent victims again.

“UUCWC was the first place where we felt comfortable being open about our relationship.”
— Lydia McMorrow

Every time, we try to understand another's struggle and walk in their shoes. To see the world from their perspective, and come closer to accepting them, we will never be the same.

The description of this service in the *Crossings* newsletter was simple and profound: “Walls are made of secrets. In the sharing of secrets we reveal who we are. As we come to know each other we are changed forever. Hear and feel some of the secrets.”

“It was astonishing”

Amazingly, as recently as Nov. 6, 1993, Skinheads, Neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan brought a campaign of hate called [Gay Bash '93](#) to Washington Crossing State Park, Pa. — just 2 miles from UUCWC. Before the event, UUCWC announced it would be a “no-hate” zone and would witness for peace and justice (see the *Trenton Times* article on page 13). WGGLBI sponsored a lecture series that included such topics as Everything You Wanted to Know About Being GLBT, Feeling Good About Being Gay, AIDS not a Gay Disease, If You Were Me, Would You Come Out?, Homosexuality and Spirituality, and Celebrating Our Relationships.

During these programs, one man with AIDS ad-



Four of the original WGGLI members, from left: Bob Griffiths, Wendy Lucas, Ruth Samsel, and Barbara Livingstone.

dressed the church about the problems he faced as a result of his homosexuality. After his death, some members of UUCWC made two quilt panels as a memorial for him and sent them to the [AIDS Memorial Quilt Project](#), then on display in Washington. Barbara Livingstone and others from the church were involved in this activity. Then-Rev. Linda DeSantis made herself available to officiate at memorial services for those who had died of AIDS.

Through actions such as these, UUCWC began to develop a reputation that attracted all people, gay or straight, who felt marginalized by organized religion. Lydia McMorrow, then partners with (and now married to) Nancy McNamara, describes what it felt like to discover and become a part of UUCWC: “We had moved to the area and were looking for a church. We tried a couple but did not find one where we felt comfortable. Then, we heard that UUCWC was a place where GLBT people were welcome and had a significant number of GLBT members. It was the first place where we felt comfortable being open about our relationship. UUCWC was, and continues to be, a place where we could be accepted as individuals and

as a couple. Also, we found the liberal theology to be consistent with our developing personal beliefs.”

One of Lydia’s earliest memories of UUCWC is of a Sunday service by WGGLBI. “I remember one segment in particular — a song, ‘Homer Phobia is Dead’, a parody of ‘Poor Judd is Dead’ from the musical *Oklahoma*. I was also struck by the fact that although the minister, Linda DeSantis, was present, she did not speak or draw attention to herself. WGGLBI was in the spotlight.”

For her part, Nancy tells how profoundly she was affected when she and Lydia discovered that UUCWC was a “welcoming” church:

“Lydia and I found UUCWC just after it became a Welcoming Community. It was astonishing! And liberating! It amazed me that there even existed a church community whose beliefs and ethics so matched my own.”

“Astonishing, after having been closeted for my whole life, I found that these folks sincerely wanted us to be there. I think this was the very first time that I felt welcome and safe in revealing who I really am.”

“Liberating, because keeping secrets and living a lie imprisons you and warps your life in so many ways. It’s hard to connect with people while keeping that kind of secret, and minor and major decisions are always affected by the need to keep the secret. I will always be thankful to UUCWC for changing that and for the friends who don’t even think of each other in terms of orientation or gender identity but simply as persons.”

Many other gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people have reported experiencing the same profoundly moving feelings of love and acceptance upon hearing welcoming words that included them — not indirectly or implicitly but directly, unapologetically, and specifically. In 1995, when Ruth and Barbara were in their 60s, they came

out to the congregation. Ruth described what that experience was like:

“I came out to the congregation when I verbally announced our 25th anniversary during joys and concerns in February 1995. Linda DeSantis later said that this was the church she wanted to serve if a person could make that announcement.”

When I asked her whether it was difficult to come out to the congregation, she replied, “No, it wasn’t hard at all because we were older and had a number of straight allies who worked with us to build programs and activities. Also, we had both been very active on the Membership, Finance, and Fundraising committees; I had been board president and Barb assumed the Peace Committee chair, so we were known entities.”

New paths, new challenges

In 1996, WGGLBI took on the name Interweave, reflecting its status as a chapter of the UUA-related organization by the same name that works toward ending oppression based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In 1998, Interweave identified its dual goals: to create local groups for LGBT UUs for support, socializing and sharing life issues; and to provide outreach to the larger GLBT community to publicize the religious alternative offered by Unitarian Universalism). Other committees held an AIDS awareness weekend with speakers and discussions. UUCWC and four other congregations attended.

Police map plans for hate group rally at Washington Crossing Park

By JOEL BEWLEY
Staff Writer

AT A GLANCE

A breakdown of some of the events planned Saturday:

11 a.m. A march through New Hope Borough by the United States Nationalist Party, (not yet approved by Borough Council).

Noon The declaration of a “No Hate Zone” at the Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing, Route 546, Titusville.

1:30 p.m. “Stop the Hate,” demonstration in the meadow across from the Thompson-Neely House at Washington Crossing Park, Route 32 and Aquatong Road. Sponsored by the Peacekeeper’s Network.

1:30 p.m. “Gay Bash ‘93,” Washington Crossing State Park, sponsored by the United States of America Nationalist Party.

5 p.m. “Unity Sing,” at the Yardley Methodist Church at the intersection of Langhorne-Yardley and Yardley-Newtown Roads. Sponsored by the Bucks County Unity Coalition.

UPPER MAKEFIELD, Pa. — Police are still at work on the security detail for the white supremacist rally this weekend in Washington Crossing State Park, fearing growing opposition to the event might spark a powder keg of violence they hope to defuse.

A group from Albany, N.Y., said members will come in force to “smash the march” and rally set for Saturday by the Philadelphia-based United States of America Nationalist Party.

The National Women’s Rights Organizing Coalition claims to have halted a similar rally the USANP held in Auburn, N.Y. in September.

USANP officer Harry Heriegel Jr. admits that his group was shut down at that march after members of the crowd began throwing batteries and rushed the marchers with baseball bats.

“They were forced to scurry away with their tails between their legs,” said Rose Lennon, who is organizing the NWROC trip.

She said her group hopes to bring more than 100 people to Saturday’s “Gay Bash ‘93” rally, and does not rule out confrontation as a means to “silence the fascists” sponsoring the event.

The USANP rally is scheduled to begin at 1:30 p.m. A march through New Hope Borough preceding the rally is still pending approval, but USANP members say they won’t be stopped if the borough council denies a parade permit.

USANP won a court fight to hold the park rally, but said it will not sue New Hope if the parade permit is not approved.

USANP Commander Ryan Wilson said his group will definitely pass through New Hope, even if members have to walk single file along the sidewalk. He said too much planning has gone into the event to postpone it further. He said he expects white supremacist groups from 10 states around the country to attend.

Sources say the borough council will hold a special meeting Thursday night to vote on the parade permit. The vote was postponed to “allow Police Chief Robert Brobson more time to give his security plan to the council.”

State police will not disclose how many troopers will be on hand at the rally, but said they will be prepared for “any situation” that may arise.

Plans call for state police to meet USANP members at an undisclosed location and search them for weapons before they are bused into New Hope.

Lennon’s group is the only organization protesting the event that has not vowed to remain in peaceful opposition on the day of the rally.

The nonprofit Peacekeeper’s Network will hold a “Stop the Hate” demonstration concurrent to the USANP rally. Organizers say the nonviolent, nonconfrontational demonstration is designed to “focus on the strength in diversity and celebrate the tolerance and acceptance of the community.”

Leaders of the Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing will designate their Titusville, N.J., parish as a “No Hate Zone” beginning at noon Saturday.

The Rev. Linda DeSantis said the move is designed to “publicly protest the proliferation of Neo-Nazi groups in our area and

Rose Lennon, who is organizing the National Women’s Rights Organizing Coalition trip, said her group hopes to bring more than 100 people to Saturday’s ‘Gay Bash ‘93’ rally, and does not rule out confrontation as a means to ‘silence the fascists’ sponsoring the event.

their toxic message of bigotry and hatred.”

The Bucks County Unity Coalition, created in April when talk of the rally first surfaced, will hold a “Unity Sing” at the Yardley Methodist Church at 5 p.m. the day of the rally.

The coalition is a conglomerate of community groups, synagogues, churches and Quaker meetings that have gathered to peacefully oppose the USANP.

Members of the Philadelphia-based gay rights group ACT UP, and Queer Nation out of New York City, are also expected to attend.

The rally permit calls for 150 participants to be cordoned off from the general public to give speeches, but organizers say they will have many more supporters mingling with members of the general public who show up for the event.

Heriegel said armed members of the Aryan Nation white supremacist group will be mixed in with the crowd in case violence erupts. He stopped short of saying the guns would be used, but said the group is determined to go through with the rally without the distractions experience at the Auburn event.

One high-ranking Bucks County official, who asked to remain anonymous, said police are under no obligation to provide protection and should stay away from the event.

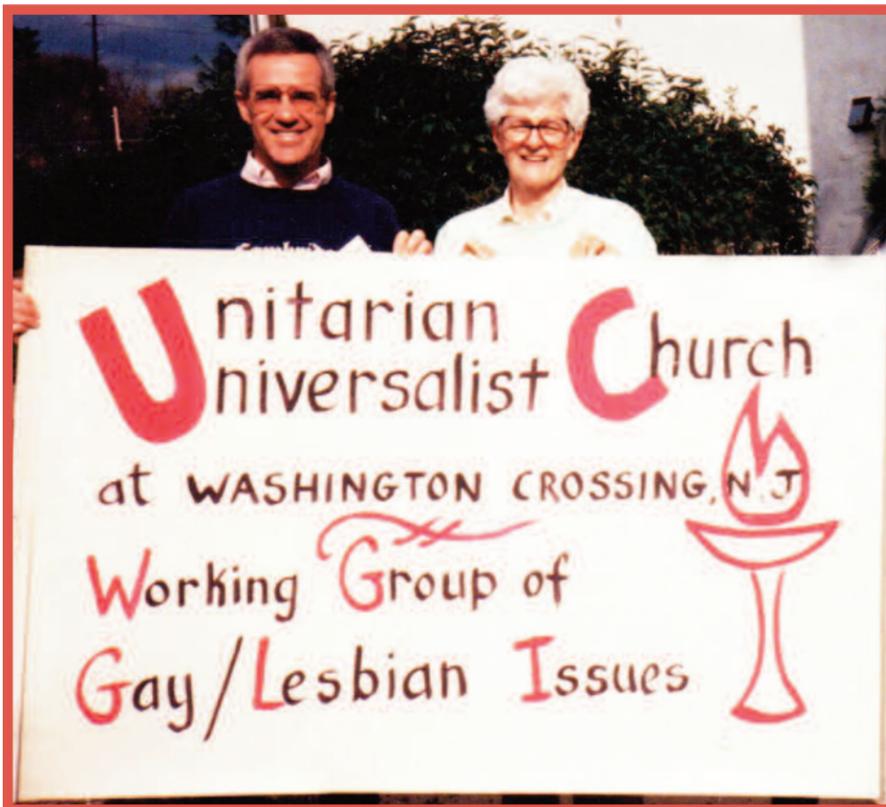
“We are dealing with a bunch of spineless cowards here,” said the official. “You think they would come if the cops weren’t there to hold their hands? Hell no, no way.”

The state agency that runs the park said tours will be canceled Saturday and has advised people to avoid the area.

A Nov. 2, 1993, Trenton *Times* article warned of the potential for violence at “Gay Bash ‘93.” In response, UUCWC declared itself a no-hate zone.

Transgender issues were starting to be discussed at UUCWC. The hard part was behind us — or so it seemed. Yet, events and controversy loomed in the 21st century, suggesting that we had more to learn about ourselves and about the need to actively reaffirm our values. These mileposts, and the strides we have made since, will be covered in Part 2 of this article, in the next issue of *Crossings*.

PHYLLIS WARREN is a retired lawyer who spent her career representing and working on behalf of abused and neglected children. Phyllis has been a member of UUCWC for more than a decade.



Bob Griffiths and Ruth Samsel with the WGGLI banner used in an AIDS walkathon in 1989.

A Conversation With Rev. Kim Wildszewski

Interview by Michael D. Dalzell

In August, Rev. Kim Wildszewski became UUCWC's 10th settled minister. Chosen unanimously by members of the congregation, Kim brings a youthful enthusiasm and a zest for relationship-building to her role.

Behind Kim's youth, however, lies someone with qualities often honed later in life: She is a careful listener, articulate, and self-assured yet humble ("I am not the holder of all the truth in the room," she says). In a wide-ranging interview with Crossings, she reflects on the challenges of being in community, shares her views on congregational growth, and expresses a clear idea of how to engage with members to take UUCWC into its second century.

CROSSINGS:

Welcome! How was Day 1 on the job?

REV. KIM WILDSZEWSKI:

Day 1 was great. One of the best things about walking into this office is that, with these windows, I can see how packed the parking lot is. There hasn't been a day yet, including Day 1, when the parking lot hasn't been filled, people are walking by, folks interacting in every corner. The plan for Day 1 was for me to unpack and for Susan to walk me through little logistical things. And the conversation and laughter and ideas just were spinning right from the get-go.

And how was Day 2?

Meetings. But what was fun about them was that they were vision meetings. They were an opportunity for me to hear from the leadership about what has happened here and what is going forward, and also to put out my philosophy of ministry and to be very intentional about setting the stage for how I want to interact with the leadership and with so many people who do so much seen and unseen ministry.

"Seen and unseen ministry" — what does that mean?

For example, Philo's all over the place. I went to one meeting with him for Earth Ministry and another for Caring Ministry, but he's also had his hands dirty in Allie's Garden and fixing things. More than anything else, I've been able to see how much ministry is happening here that doesn't necessarily have a title — it's just part of the working life of the institution.

You told me the other day that, "After only a few weeks, I can see how this congregation chooses to be together." What do you see?

We're all ministers. Identifying how we do our ministry in the world is part of what happens in community, and that's especially true in Unitarian Universalism and at Washington Crossing. You can't meet somebody here who hasn't been a Worship Associate or who hasn't spent time with kids or planted something in the Memorial Garden or gone to a cottage meeting or done pastoral care.



Relationships are taken seriously, and that builds a community.

Being in community is not an easy thing. It would be much easier if it was just what we were expected to do as part of the larger culture where boundaries are very clear. Those boundaries might be ritualized in "this capacity" or "this person has the authority," and we would spend Sunday morning together and then go home.

Unitarian Universalism is called the "chosen faith." People often say, "That's because 88% of our folks have come from another denomination." I think of something different, and I wish this were articulated more: I was raised Unitarian Universalist, but this is still my chosen faith. I come here every Sunday because I make a choice to participate with other human beings who have flaws and faults and who might have a different opinion than me about the world. When we come together on Sunday and enter into a space where we ask each other to wonder out loud and to journey together, there isn't going to be one rote



Rev. Kim Wildszewski
and her wife, Tara

answer. Which means that we're going to bump up against each other. Which means that it would be much easier to go back home and watch *Sunday Morning* on CBS and let it make us feel good than it would be to come together with human beings who push our buttons and also make us feel closer together.

The fact that Washington Crossing has a Committee on Ministry shows me how seriously we take being in relationship with one another. Our theology, being covenantal, means that we are going to make promises, and unlike a contract — when that promise is broken the contract is broken — the covenant says, 'OK, we've broken this. How are we going to enter into a difficult situation and see each other through? Which, of course, leads to forgiveness of the self and of each other, and then a repromise that enters us back into a relationship. I've had meetings where it's clear there's tension between some of the committee members, but they all come together with best intentions and a desire to hear each other. Folks here are well practiced at covenantal relationships, when it would be much easier to go elsewhere.

You strike me as someone who is a good listener. That's an important quality of being in relationship.

After the vote to call me here, Farzad said, "Now you've got your own congregation." And I said, "No, now I *serve* a congregation." That's really how I see my role. I am young; I hope that when

I'm not as young, I still will have the perception that I am not the holder of all of the truth in the room. If I'm assuming that leadership means that I have all the answers, then my tenure is going to be really short and the opportunity for my own growth is going to be limited. If I'm not going to be present to the relationships in front of me, then that's a good time to look at where else I should be.

UUs' untapped well of goodness is the fact that we're storytellers, especially because so many of us have chosen this tradition. We have entered into a journey that feels more attuned to who we are. With a theology that talks about one's own experience and multiple truths that exist, the revelation being continuous, if we aren't asking each other to tell our stories, we're really missing out on so much of what the sacred has to offer within our own community. Not listening to that and what's being shared is a missed opportunity.

You did a lot of things in your three years at Summit. What one accomplishment are you particularly proud of?

One thing I didn't know I had done was reflected back to me as I was leaving. I changed the meditation and prayer during the worship service. As the assistant minister, when I wasn't preaching on Sunday I was the professional worship associate. I did the welcome, the offering — the pieces of worship other than the sermon — and part of that was leading the meditation and prayer each week.

It had begun as a scripted meditation that ritualized the loss of American soldiers in Iraq. When we left Iraq, we had to rethink what we were going to say. That was an opportunity. What I ended up saying that week in the pulpit was "You are able to be cared for, and you are able to care for others." And what followed was a huge culture shift where people started to take seriously what community life could be: They could bring all of their hurts and flaws and need for forgiveness and celebrations. But for the first time in a long while, it was part of a weekly reminder that "This is what we do by being together." So, that's a big one.

The other one — and I was very aware of this — I got to serve at Summit while New Jersey was going through the marriage equality process. Our civil union was everything Tara and I wanted it to be — and yet it was unfinished. I got a chance to

talk to this very well-intentioned, caring congregation about how there are still great injustices for people within UU circles, like one of their ministers. Professionally, I brought my heart-break to that congregation around LGBT issues, and they could hear it differently because I was speaking about my own experience and family life and was able to speak for some of the congregants who hurt just as much as I did.

Is your sexual orientation a means for attracting new members?

It's not something I will do intentionally. It's going to be something that happens because I bring my whole self to the ministry. A couple of things will happen there naturally: One, being somebody who is not straight and as a public figure in the pulpit is going to be an invitation, especially within a religious environment that other traditions or other places might not be able to offer. The data show that within a 3-to-5 year time period, your congregation will reflect similar demographics as that who is in your pulpit. We should be seeing some sort of mirror there.

Two, I don't plan to leave Tara or how our family will look like out of my sermons. I will always have a mind for a part of me that is marginalized, and I will bring that to my ministry just like I always have. It helps me stay present to ways in which others are marginalized. I would never "use" my sexual orientation for anything, but it's a part of me. And I will use all parts of me.

So, what are your thoughts about congregational growth?

I do not believe in growth for growth's sake. I don't think you'll get too far with that. Newcomers will smell that in the parking lot if they are perceived as the next member of a committee or the next pledge. That's not the reason to grow.

That said, membership was a huge portion of my role at Summit and is a passion of mine. I get really excited about why we enter into community and what UUCWC's unique offering is to the world. If we could no longer exist, what would be lost? I have a very clear understanding of what makes people feel comfortable about entering into a congregation, how we need to be clear about what we do and why we do it, how someone might hear and identify with that, and



how their stories can be heard rather than us just telling them our story.

My focus is always on inreach before outreach. I don't believe in inviting people over for dinner if you don't have the recipe. If we are a healthy congregation who understands our purpose in the world — how everything we do leads back to our mission to create community, celebrate life, and changing the world — then that attracts success.

How does that tie into Stewardship?

Nobody wants to give to an institution that says, "We need \$10,000 or we're going under." I don't want to be a part of something that's going under. But if you say, "Mike, tell me how this place has changed who you are in the world? Tell me how it has changed your family life or how you listen to the news." To be able to articulate that is one of the blessings of our congregational polity.

Your role differs from a transitional minister in that you're not necessarily coming in to rock the boat. But surely there are one or two things you'd like to focus on this year?

Membership is one of the big ones: Getting the Membership Committee on board with what they do, why they do it, and how they communicate that is huge.

I'm really excited about where we see that going. In conversations with Marty Friedman and Bill Cox, we've discussed creating an online webinar so that of younger parents who can't imagine spending another hour in the church or at a meeting can sit with their kids in the next room or join us online. So, I have some ideas that I think will be both welcomed and a change.

Same goes for the Council for Faith in Action and Pastoral Associates. A lot of my task — and this will be a change — is getting folks to articulate how they work in the system and why they work

that way. When we ask them "Why?", then ask them, "Is this the best way we could go about it?" My goal for the congregation — and I don't think this will be done in the first year, but we can begin the conversation from the pulpit and other places — is to streamline our ministry. That's the intention of theme-based ministry. So, for September, what does it mean to be a people of promise? For October, what does it mean to be a people of renewal? Hopefully, the whole ministry will engage in this conversation through different avenues.

We've had already some interesting conversations in planning meetings about what in our worship service is welcoming and builds community, and what is unintentionally exclusionary. That's a really fragile conversation. Because I am a newcomer, I'm going to be able to articulate — lovingly, I hope — what is confusing to me, where I don't feel like I can enter, and what is hard for me to feel welcomed into.

On your website, you talk about your passion for justice. Justice is a word that means different things to different people. How do you define justice — and how does that shape the work you'd like to encourage through your ministry?

I define justice as being able to live as a whole person. That doesn't mean that you live without pain or heartbreak or conflict. It means, "How do you exist in the world where pieces of yourself are not excluded or damned to be able to participate in a larger culture?"

So, for those of us who are privileged or have access to resources — whether it's time, or money, or the just ability to sit down and think — *justice making* can mean "How do we create an environment in which more people can exist as a whole person?" If we aren't engaging in justice



making and justice recognition, it is a disservice to our own lives, our congregation, and the traditions behind which we gather.

Now, that looks different for different people. For some people, expressing their justice making is going to Trenton or Harrisburg and carrying a picket sign. For other people, it's giving financially. Some of the work that's mine to do in my ministry is trying to give people different access points to justice work.

You have said that you are grounded in the First and Seventh Principles. Tell us about that.

Our principles are not a belief system. Many people look at the principles and say, "Of course, I can get on board with that, but that's not a religion." Well, no, but if you stand in line at the grocery store on a Thursday at 6 pm, there are people rushing and tense and someone's kids behind you are digging a shopping cart into your calves. Remember, that person has dignity. Then, follow that with being interconnected — meaning, "What I do, how I behave, what energy I bring to this space is directly going to affect those around me." We can always recognize how someone else's energy affects our own lives, but we also need to recognize how our energy affects somebody else. That is hard work. It takes practice and intention and a want to be engaged in humanness.

I have preached a sermon about how the principles are not ranked in order from 1 being most important to 7 being the least. I think it would be our benefit to put the Seventh Principle first and the First Principle last. There was a Catholic spiritual director who talked about how we are all spiritual beings but we cannot practice spirituality in isolation. We need to be isolated at times for spiritual practice, but we also need to recognize that it's all about community.

Do you have a regular spiritual practice?

I practice spirituality by making time to pray or meditate or run. Sometimes it's reading poetry or taking a walk on the towpath. I can't say "I pray every day"; I engage different parts of myself to exist in a more attentive way.

Tara is a runner, and she taught me how to run. The big thing I learned is how to breathe. I had gotten into a rhythm where I was putting pressure

on the same parts of my body, which leads to injuries. She taught me that if I breathe in on one step and breathe out on the next two, you put pressure on different parts of your body and build endurance. You need endurance if you are a runner. It's the same when you have a spiritual practice. I have to stay on my toes and put pressure on different parts of myself when engaging in spiritual practice.

You've written that "I rest comfortably in the hyphen of Humanist-Theist." That's beautiful writing, but what does that mean?

I don't think humanism is devoid of theism. William Ellery Channing says, "The divine light is within each of us." Doing good works and forgiveness are expressions of the divine. Forgiveness comes from our deepest yearnings. That's the easiest way to identify what is beautiful. It's the co-creation of the divine. The divine is supernatural. The beauty is in recognizing how divinity expresses itself.

As we wrap up, what would you like to leave readers with?

A couple of things. I hope that this congregation takes its relationship with me as seriously as I will with you. I won't receive anonymous criticism. If I hear something like, "A couple of people are upset with your dangling earrings because it's distracting from the pulpit," and if I don't know who those people are, then I would become wary of my interactions with everyone. That's not healthy.

I want to set the stage for shared ministry. You have hired me to be the person who sets the vision and listens to the congregation and articulates that back to you. That won't always be easy to receive. When it's not easy, Parker Palmer says to turn to wonder: "I wonder why I feel this way?" It's not always going to be easy, and not everyone is going to see me as the next best shiny thing. And that's OK, because if we don't stay there, then that means we are growing.

Thank you.

MICHAEL D. DALZELL is a freelance writer, editor, and an award-winning journalist. He became a member of UUCWC in 2006 and serves on its board of trustees.

The Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing presents the Third

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NOVEMBER 14 AND 15, 2014

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14 ★ DOORS OPEN AT 6:30 P.M.

7:00–8:30 P.M. ★ STARHAWK TALES

Starhawk speaks informally of over three decades of Goddess and earth-based spirituality, writing, and social activism, telling stories from her travels and broad range of interactions.

8:30 P.M. ★ BOOK SIGNING

Meet Starhawk and have your books signed. Books available Friday only.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15 ★ DOORS OPEN AT 8:30 A.M.

**9:00–11:00 A.M. ★ THE SAMSTONE LECTURE:
TAKING ROOT: GROUNDING SPIRIT IN THE EARTH**

Birth, growth, death and regeneration, the basic cycles of life, are reflected in the stories of the Goddess and the teachings of earth-based spirituality. Let Starhawk share earth's amazing story and awaken a deepened awareness of our personal journeys.

11:00 A.M.–12:00 P.M. ★ LUNCH (included with preregistration only)

12:00–2:00 P.M. ★ BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Registration Deadline: November 5th ★ Register for both sessions and save!

- Full registration (Friday and Saturday) – \$75
- Friday evening only – \$35
- Saturday only – \$50 (lunch included with preregistration only)
- Students (full registration with student ID) – \$25

Starhawk is one of the most respected voices in modern Goddess religion and earth-based spirituality. She is the author or coauthor of twelve books, including the classics, *The Spiral Dance* and *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. Starhawk is deeply committed to bringing the techniques and creative power of spirituality to political activism.



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Go to uucwc.org/samstone2014 to register. • Contact samstone@uucwc.org with questions.