

Crossings

Spring 2016

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

Creating Community
How the auction lives on all year

Lay-Led Services
A diverse expression of faith

Spiritual Awakening
Terry Caton's 'Epiphany'





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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, it can be easy to miss 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.

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Open to You.

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PHOTO BY BARBARA DREW

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

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As UUCWC celebrates 100 years, four members have been with us for half that time. In **Part 2** of this series, lifelong UU Terry Caton shares how she found her true spiritual niche at UUCWC.

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And it's not a single Saturday night out, either. From volunteer opportunities to intimate dinners and fun-filled events, UUCWC's annual auction helps us create community year round.

ON OUR COVER: Auction co-chairs Connie Schofer and Jayme Trott hand out last year's auction books. Photo by Lou Csabay.

WAYSIDE PULPIT

Lay-led services long have been a tradition at UUCWC. The diversity of faith expression from one service to the next is in keeping with several UU principles. Lay-led services have undergone many phases in our congregation, including changes to this very day.

Story by **Phyllis Warren**

Imagine for a moment, the following scene: One man is chasing another man around the sanctuary in an apparent attempt to kill him, while the congregation watches, transfixed. The two men struggle. No one moves to intercept the action.

No, this is not a terrorist attack or a cowardly group of people. This is, in fact, part of a lay-led service, one held many years ago at UUCWC. The man being pursued was Bernie Ruekgauer, one of the most respected and active members of our congregation. The man in pursuit was Dan Noonan, a former member. This service was about the symbolic passing of power in Pagan myth from the goddess's consort, portrayed by Bernie, to the younger god, portrayed by Dan.

Of course, being a scripted part of the service, Bernie was obligated — after pursuit and a valiant fight — to relinquish his power to the younger god and become a wise elder, but no longer a god.

Some UU congregations cannot afford to pay a minister, so lay-led services are a necessity. However, most congregations with a full-time minister — who is responsible for the creation and presentation of the worship service and its components, such as the homily, readings, and hymns, and for setting the overall tone of services — embrace the tradition of lay-led services, which provide congregants with an opportunity to create and conduct worship services.

INSPIRED BY OUR PRINCIPLES

Unitarian Universalism has had a long and cher-

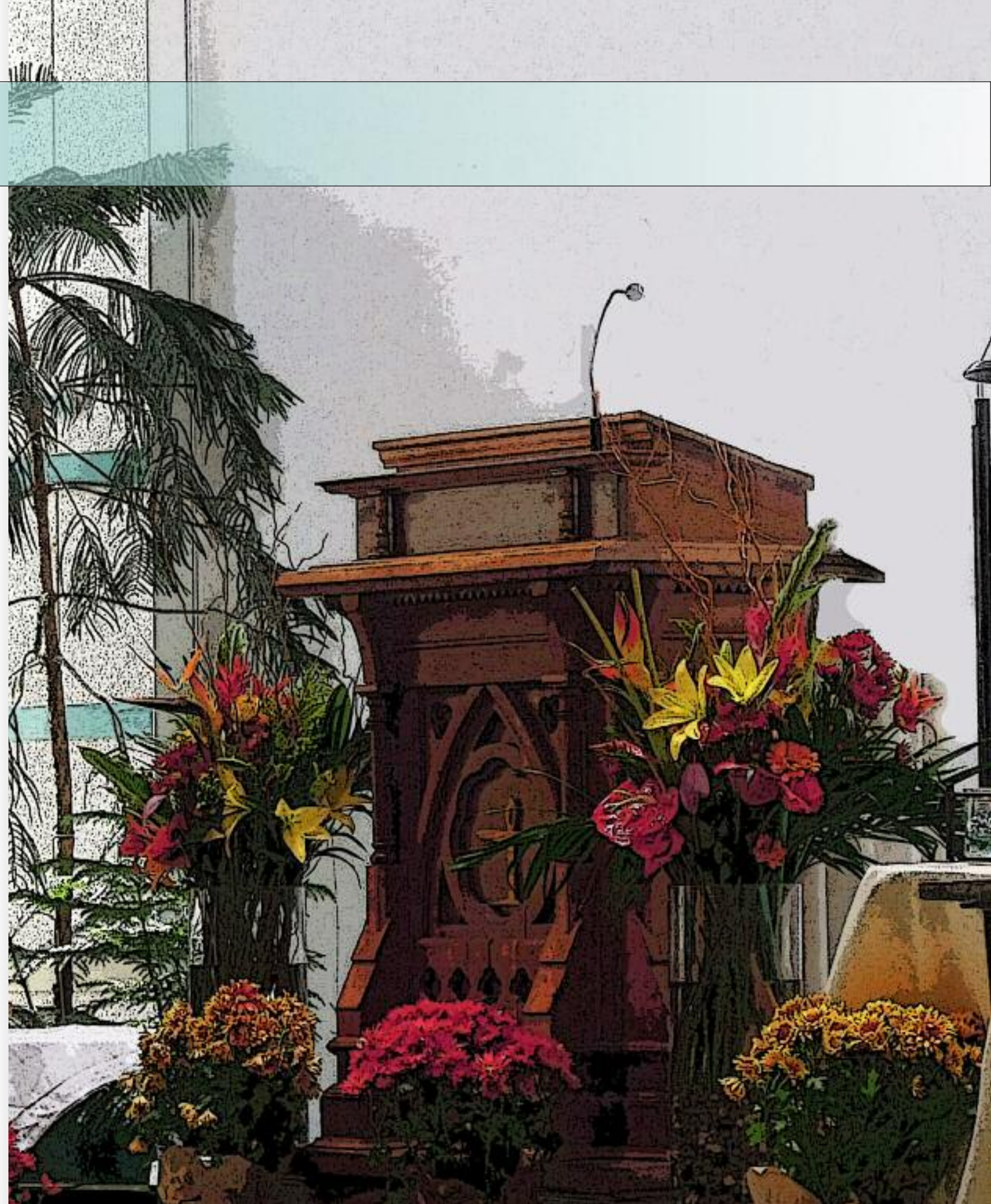
ished tradition of encouraging congregants not only to participate in services led by ministers but to actively create their own services. The choice to have lay-led services is based on many factors, some that bear directly on our 7 Principles. This includes the 3rd and 4th Principles: “acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth” and “a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.”

These principles prompt us to not only respect differences of opinion but to honor them. We practice humility by recognizing that our own truths may not be someone else's truth, and that for each of us, the truths we embrace today may radically change tomorrow. As UUs, we are encouraged to grow from the diversity of worldviews we hold. How better to do that than to experience a worship service where readings, quotations, music, homilies, and storytelling reflect to the congregation our own belief systems, values, sources of inspiration, motivation, and pivotal life experiences?

For many of the same reasons, UUCWC's minister, Rev. Kim Wildszewski, is a strong advocate for lay-led services. “To me, a sermon is not truth given. It is an offering. Every Sunday I am just offering you where I am on a given topic and which I hope you will consider. And through that consideration, perhaps you will reject it and through that rejection you deepen; perhaps you will affirm it and through that affirmation you deepen,” she says.

“I would never pretend to have ‘ultimate truth,’ because that's not who we are as UUs.”

3rd PRINCIPLE
Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth



PERSPECTIVES ON LAY-LED SERVICES: GERI KOBLIS



Geri Koblis has participated in a number of lay-led services. In one, she and fellow UUCWC member Nancy Logue covered a nontraditional subject with spiritual implications. “Instead of the conventional sermon,” she says, “Nancy and I did an interactive exercise related to the topic of food and nourishing oneself.”

When Geri led her first lay service, she “didn’t have a clue” about the structure of a UUCWC service. “At that time [the early 2000s], small groups were encouraged to do a service. Most of our group was relatively new to UUCWC and none of us had ever served as a worship associate. We had a regular field day! To my amazement, we received kind words and compliments from those who attended our service.”

Geri recalls that the collaboration needed to develop and deliver a service fostered closer relations among the group. “Some of the discussions we had related to the service topic were deep and personal. Usually, the sermon was the most challenging part of planning a service, so we tended to avoid it and found alternate means of presenting our spiritual message.”

A certain amount of eclecticism has come to be associated with lay-led services. As the website for the Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church of Portland, Maine, states, “Each person is part of the ministry of our church.” We all have something to contribute to a worship service, be it playing music, leading the congregation in a silent or guided meditation, acting in a skit, dancing, singing, or reading poetry. Lay-led services provide us with the opportunity to share our unique gifts with each other and immeasurably add to the richness of our congregational diversity.

DIVERSITY OF SOURCE MATERIAL

UUCWC member Bill Cox believes that “lay-led services are one way of finding out what people in the congregation are thinking and what’s important to them,” adding that it is an effective way of taking the pulse of the community. (He also likes the chance to stand up and tell jokes.)

In 2009, Bill gave a sermon called “Beyond Belief,” based on the emerging international understanding of the sciences, a new cosmology known as “Big History” — a creation story of the universe based on scientific conclusions, as opposed to the creation myths of flat-earth cultures. Bill thinks that Unitarian Universalism needs to examine this emerging agreement of the origins of the universe and of all living things as a basis for spiritual exploration. Call it the Great Story or Big History, he sees it as a unifying and evolving universal history for all peoples of the earth, transcending the static tribal stories we’ve been taught.

“Language has the power to knit people together and create a common consciousness,” he says. In creating such a consciousness, there are many voices worth listening to, and lay-led services help perform that important task.

Lay-led services have also arisen from current events. The passing of folk singer Pete Seeger, for example, led to a service in which Bill, Greg Pontier, and George Faulkner worked together to honor the longtime Unitarian Universalist’s relentless pursuit of social justice through his music — music that inspired so many to social action.

Some topics at lay-led services may be very personal. A 2015 sermon by Tony Panzetta movingly and candidly addressed the issues arising from his own aging.

Like Bill Cox, Terry Caton — “author” of the scene you were asked to envision at the beginning of this article — has used the pulpit as an expression of personal faith.

The first lay service Terry participated in, in 1964, was a joint presentation by the youth group in the church. She focused on “the Golden Rule” from three perspectives — Christian (“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”), Confucian (“Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you”) and Jewish (“Love thy neighbor as thyself”). She then explained which conceptualization was the most useful and why. (She recalls that she was asked a question from the

congregation about existentialism, which suggests something about the informality of services at that time.)

Terry believes that one value of lay-led services is to present a very personal aspect of oneself. The goal is for the congregation to learn and to understand more about her beliefs and to “give others a chance to hear what makes her a person of faith.” Lay-led services have allowed her to introduce her evolving theology of Paganism to the congregation, “especially when I’ve shared the rituals at Solstice or Yule services.”

Terry also organized services about Cakes for the Queen of Heaven, in which she rewrote a Biblical story from a woman’s perspective. One service included a puppet show. A follow-up service, “Rise Up and Call Her Name,” included dancing. One of the benefits of lay-led services

as a vehicle for the personal expression of belief, she says, is that this expression is not limited to words: “It can employ a variety of techniques and formats, such as physicality, music, and rhythm, silence and dance and play, in addition to narrative.”

In March 2015, Terry participated in a lay-led service with Betsy Young and

Frank Holstein on the issue of resilience. Terry talked about resilience from the perspective of being a longtime member. She talked about the aftermath for the congregation in relation to the abuse by a minister at UUCWC during the 1980s. The issues had never been fully aired, she said, adding that it was important to open the door to discussion about what happened so that the congregation could learn from it.

UUCWC’S HISTORY OF LAY-LED SERVICES

Lay-led services have had a long tradition at UUCWC. Rev. Kim acknowledges that her own personal religious background plays into her conviction that this tradition should continue.

“I was raised in a lay-led fellowship, so that’s a big part of who I am,” she says. “My parents were giving services; my friends’ parents were giving services; the coming-of-agers were giving the services ... we had no role models teaching us ‘This is what UU is.’ We had to figure it out and do it together. It is my kernel, my nugget, of who we are, and I love it about us.”

At various periods from the 1930s through the early 1960s, our congregation — then located in Trenton — had no minister, necessitating lay-led services. We have had a settled minister almost continuously since 1962, at which point the tradition ended for a while. Longtime congregants Mary Ann Sprenkle and Betsy Young actively worked to restore the occasional lay-led service in the late 1960s, and since then our ministers have embraced lay-led services to varying degrees.

Even our welcoming statement, which appears on the last page of each

4th PRINCIPLE
A free and responsible
search for truth
and meaning.

PERSPECTIVES ON LAY-LED SERVICES: CHRIS PIATEK



Chris Piatek is a veteran of lay-led services. Eager as everyone else to discuss them, Chris has participated in numerous services, including “History as a Process of Spirit” (co-led with Liz Lacey-Osler), “Authenticity and Connection Through Memoir,” “Embracing the Possibilities of Forgiveness,” and “Making Room for the Muse” (co-led with Sara Holcombe). She also assisted with Anne MacLean in a service for what was then the Journey Toward Wholeness Committee and as a member of the Committee on Ministry (now the Right Relations Committee).

Not all of the services Chris has participated in have been serious, however; the focus of one service for which she served as worship associate to Caryl Tipton was on the spirituality of the music of the Beatles!

Chris says participating in the creation of services with an emotional center is both cathartic and meaningful for her; doing so also helps her work through some issue she may be thinking about at the time, such as with her service about forgiveness.

Planning and staging lay-led services, she believes, creates a sense of intimacy with others. Through lay-led services, she says, “We learn so much about each other that likely wouldn’t come up in ordinary conversation.” She also enjoys the fact that lay-led services are often “spiritual, eclectic, relaxing, and low-key.” Many of them are of professional quality, she believes, and provide a terrific opportunity for UUCWC members to express their creativity.

PERSPECTIVES ON LAY-LED SERVICES: RICH DiGEORGIO



Rich DiGeorgio, chair of UUCWC's Communications Ministry and an active member of the congregation, fondly remembers three services he crafted or orchestrated. One, developed by his Positive Psychology group, was called "Positive Psychology and Your Everyday Spiritual Life." Kingsley Seville, Helen Dodson, and Karen DiGeorgio put on the service, the message of which was: If engaging in gratification is the key to happiness in the present, then insufficient appreciation of the positive events in your past and overemphasis on the bad ones undermine serenity, contentment, and satisfaction. "Marty Seligman, father of Positive Psychology, said that 'Gratitude amplifies the savoring and appreciation of the good events, and rewriting history by forgiveness loosens the power of bad events to embitter,'" says Rich.

A second service focused on Father's Day. The third — and latest — "Love 2.0," explored a variety of aspects and perspectives on love, based on the scientific work by Brene Browne on the physiological and sociological side of the effects of love.

"It was a really good experience," Rich of "Love 2.0," adding that he had "a lot of fun pulling it together." Rich felt he had struck a chord when asked to share the sermon's text with some congregants, as well as being asked to give the service at another UU congregation.

Sunday's order of service, provides a clue to the enduring nature of lay-led services:

We believe that each person is on a unique spiritual journey informed by personal experience, conscience, and reason. Ours is a religion where people with different beliefs worship together as one faith. All are welcome."

Many UU churches use the summer months to look within for spiritual growth and renewal, and so congregations with a full-time minister often turn to their own members for inspiration, education, and creativity during the summer. UUCWC did this, too, for two decades. Rev. Linda DeSantis, who became our minister in 1990, did not like sharing the pulpit. In her view, the congregation had all summer to conduct lay-led services, and she limited them to that period. When Rev. Charles Stephens became the minister, he took summers off, so summer remained a key time for lay-led services.

Whatever the reason, their endurance at UUCWC does not mean that lay-led services have always been met with an unqualified "Hooray!" Just ask a fellow congregant about his or her views on lay-led services, and yes, you may hear a joyful exclamation about a service that moved or inspired him, challenged her perspective, or just made her think about something for the first time. You might also get a detailed litany of things gone awry or that just missed the mark, services that were too long or boring, or services that were either disappointing or lacked a spiritual component. These potential pitfalls have led to recent changes in when lay-led services occur, how they are designed, and who conducts them.

LAY-LED SERVICES EVOLVING

Rev. Kim has considered the range of quality inherent in lay-led services in the context of summer. Many visitors come to UUCWC in the summer, which is traditionally a time for "church shopping" — especially among families looking for religious education offerings for the children. A family's choice of church is often dependent on their experience at each congregation they visit.

"It's really important to capture those visitors and to give them an accurate reflection of who we are," says Rev. Kim. Because she is in the pulpit year-round, lay-led services are no longer a summer staple at UUCWC. Rather, Rev. Kim has sprinkled them across the calendar, January through December.

To ensure that lay-led services feed the spirit carefully and professionally, Rev. Kim has retained a concept initiated by transitional minister Rev. Jennifer Brooks: the use of three congregants, rather than one, to lead the service. "Because yours is one perspective among three, it tempers the expression," says Rev. Kim. "It also creates a space where collaboration is essential.

"I think when three people are giving a lay-led service it also becomes more professional," she continues. "Although most lay-led services

work beautifully, at other times it has really been a free-for-all. When that happens, it is a disservice to the person and the congregation."

Rev. Kim's take on services in general has influenced some of the new structure of both professional and lay-led services: the monthly theme. "Worship life should be a conversation that feeds off itself, that evolves, that deepens. Having a theme ensures that no matter who is in the pulpit, there is no break in the flow of the conversation that's already happening."

This view of the service as a conversation has also changed the process of selecting participants for lay-led services. "In choosing who will be responsible for a specific services that month, rather than asking: 'Who will speak Sunday?' the worship associate and I get together and ask ourselves: 'Who is the best or most appropriate person to speak to this issue?'" she says.

This means that rather than having a sign-up sheet for lay-led services, the decision of who speaks and on what topic is now a collaborative process between the worship associate and the minister. Music Ministry Director Caryl Tipton also has an essential role in preparing a service, ensuring the collaboration of many people to create a seamless service whose elements support the monthly sermon theme.

The practice of lay-led services at UUCWC is characterized by both change and tradition. Lay-led services continue to be an important tradition in our congregation because they promote so many of our values, allow us to get to know one another better, encourage collaboration, and provide the ability for each of us to share our unique spiritual perspectives, insights, and passions.

The perception of how lay-led services fits into the larger scheme of congregational life continues to change and, with it, differences in how lay-led services are conducted, how often they are held, when they take place, how the participants are selected, and ensuring that those services are in sync with the theme of the month. The invisible hand of the minister is working behind the scenes, leading to an organized, professional service that facilitates the flow of conversation.

Although the days when two men chased each other around the sanctuary are probably over, the excitement and anticipation about the changes that have begun, and will no doubt continue, remains.

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 and last wrote for Crossings about UUCWC's journey as a Welcoming Congregation.

PERSPECTIVES ON LAY-LED SERVICES: NINA TODOR



Ask Nina Todor about lay-led services, and she enthusiastically answers, "I really like them." Nina participated in Chris Piatek's service on forgiveness, calling it a "wonderful experience. Chris had a vision of what she wanted, and it was very organized — almost like working with Charles [Stephens, our former minister]. Chris allowed me to use something I found in the hymnal to change some of the wording, and I did a meditation [responsive reading] on that. We worked together on the format, Kathy Frey performed some guitar pieces, there were some contemplative aspects — it all blended well."

Nina, who has considerable experience with lay-led services, likens them to "putting on a show. You have to hold people's attention, make them think and maybe offer something with meaning for their lives. Or, have them walk away with something after the service."

Lay-led services bring new ideas, a different perspective, and "a different kind of energy" to congregational life, Nina believes. "A service that is lay-led usually involves something that a person has done a lot of work on in their life or it involves a personal passion to. That focus makes listeners pay attention in a different way."



Over the course of our centennial year, Margaret DeAngelis is interviewing all four of our living members who have been with our congregation for 50 years — half our history.

What she found inspiring about this process is that each woman tells her own story of a community that continues to grow, to reach for new understandings, and to honor our history in the process. The most common thread among these women is that each is still passionate about our church, excited about how we are growing, and hopeful for our future.

4 Women and a Congregation

A People of Faith

Terry Caton grew up in Unitarian churches, but she found her true spiritual niche at UUCWC. As both our faith and our congregation have become more spiritually inclusive, she has been an active participant in this evolution.

Story by Margaret DeAngelis

As a girl, Terry Caton moved around a lot — from the Washington, D.C., area to Annapolis, Md., to Springfield, Ill., to Yardley, Pa. — all before the age of 18. This sort of nomadic existence extended to her church experiences as well.

After moving from the D.C. area to Annapolis, her parents became charter members of the [Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis](#). “I remember meeting in different places,” she recalls of those years in Annapolis — “storefronts, a school, St. John’s library.”

The theme continued when the family moved to Springfield when she was 9 — and again, later, when she moved to our area as a teenager.

“We lived just up the street from a Unitarian church that was housed in the YMCA,” she says of Springfield. “The church moved around a lot, but like a lot of churches, we were growing.” In 1964, she moved to Yardley and became active in our church, then the First Unitarian Church of Trenton. “I was there when the church sold the property [in the late 1960s] and moved around in search of a new home.”

Like every teenager, Terry questioned her religion, but felt at the time that this was home for her. When Terry graduated from college in 1968, she moved to Highland Park, near New Brunswick

— and though she attended our church when she would come back to visit her parents, she dropped out for about 10 years until she moved back to the area.

A spiritual epiphany

Interestingly, the arc of Unitarian Universalist spirituality dovetailed with Terry’s own inspirations in her formative years.

“As I grew up in the Unitarian church in the 1950s and ’60s, the emphasis of the church was quite humanist: ‘Let’s make this life the best we can,’” she says. “When the Universalists joined with us, then the whole aspect of spirituality took on a much larger role.

“I always had been interested in myth, so I read a lot of mythology growing up. At around 8 years old, I had an amazing book that talked about the formation of the world. Then one night, I looked and it was gone. Mom and Dad said they didn’t know where it went.”

Terry laughs. “It was only later on I realized I had been reading Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. I guess my mother decided it was too X-rated to read at age 8.

“But the wonderful part of being UU is that you



Terry, back row, second from left with the Liberal Religious Youth Group in the mid-'60s.

can use many inspirations from different religions to guide you along the way. You can borrow and own something. It’s a shared ministry from different religious perspectives.”

Some people who come to Unitarian Universalism from different religions get to have an “epiphany,” Terry says. For this lifelong UU, Terry’s spiritual epiphany came in the late 1980s, when the then-minister’s wife brought the Cakes for the Queen of Heaven curriculum to UUCWC.

“It let me realize that as a female I could continue to grow in a religious and spiritual sense,” says Terry. “Julie Jenkins allowed us as women to see that we had religious and spiritual power. We had already begun to see women grow in political and economic areas, but as far as religion — not so much.”

It wasn’t that the UU church didn’t have an open pulpit; even then, there were women in the ministry. More accurately, Terry thinks, many women just didn’t give this level of participation in their faith a lot of thought.

Cakes for the Queen of Heaven, she says, “described the history of women in a religious aspect. We learned that we, as women, had a voice at one time in the really early stages of organized religion. Women had the guidance of church in their hands!

“We participated in 13 classes, and it gave us the ability to think about history in depth. It was a lot to take in, and we all leaned on each other and explored new ideas together. We realized there was this whole missing part to our own history. It was an amazing class and an amazing time.”

Though the original class lasted 13 weeks, its effect at UUCWC was permanent. “Many women became empowered and became spokespeople for our church. They were able to talk about religion and the world around them in terms of the impact that religion can make.”

Nurturing her faith

Cakes for the Queen of Heaven fed into Terry’s interest in ancient mythology, too. “The Pagan religions, which were much older than the Jewish and Buddhist religions, had female power in them. When I realized that, it was so eye-opening! Cakes for the Queen of Heaven made me realize that the past was not dead and gone. These myths still had power in my life. They could still change us and give us a lesson of sorts.”

UUCWC’s vision statement says that we “will be an inclusive faith community focusing our energy and resources on spiritual deepening.” If Cakes for the Queen of Heaven was the first step in that pledge to Terry, the church’s receptiveness to

My epiphany came from Cakes for the Queen of Heaven.

Terry sharing her Pagan spirituality with others in the congregation was the second.

“When I was invited to join a group to look at the Wicca curriculum, I became so excited,” she says. “I helped to create a circle at church. Most of the group split off after that and wanted to meet privately at home, but I wanted the practices and teaching to be available in public. I felt if someone wanted to come and watch us, there was nothing to be afraid of.”

For several years during the 1990s, the Pagan circle was active. Eventually, the work of organizing a monthly ritual became quite a bit of work as the circle became smaller, and eventually, it came to an end. But Terry is grateful for the opportunity to have shared her spiritual passions with others, some of whom may have known little about Pagan traditions or had misconceptions about them. It allowed her to show that Unitarian Universalism pitches a big tent.

“I believe all paths lead to the truth.”

Turning points and memories

Though Terry felt safe practicing her faith openly here, has she thought of our church as a safe place for all, no matter what? “I’m not sure how open it was early on,” she says, “because [in the early days] sexual orientation was not spoken about.” Over time, of course, this changed at UUCWC.

“During Rev. Peter Jenkins’s time, I remember going to talks at the church in the evening. There was a gentleman from Princeton who spoke about being bisexual. We were [going through an awareness](#) that involved the whole congregation. We had extremely active Worship Associates who brought in speakers with many different points of view.”

One of the turning points in our church, Terry says, was when Rev. DeSantis came on. “She encouraged the Welcoming Congregation and was so active in building our church,” she recalls. Rev. DeSantis was a bold thinker. When the congregation was debating whether to build today’s sanc-

tuary, “She would say, ‘Build it. We will find the money. Have faith in yourself. Stop talking about it and build it.’” And we did.

Looking back over her time as a member of our congregation, Terry stops to think about whether she would like to have seen anything about our church in her early years carried forward.

“I enjoyed ‘Forum,’ where two or three people led us in discussion about a certain situation, and we could ask

questions,” she says.

“Sometimes, if a speaker came in, he or she would also leave time for questions. I remember a young man coming in talking about the Vietnam War. It was wonderful. And on a

Sunday morning, it wasn’t a dry talk — each had a theological or spiritual edge. I liked that idea. But we are bigger in size now and that may not work any more.”

Is there anything that she would change today? “Having the same order of service brings with it a similar pattern. Many people like patterns and the tradition of things. They like ritual. For example, when the chalice is lit. I remember when people who lit the chalice had to come up with their own words.”

Today, of course, we repeat the words, “Let us open our eyes to see what is beautiful...” at each chalice lighting. And Terry is quick to acknowledge that there is a place for this type of ritual.

Our church has grown enough that we have programs that are so inclusive that there is something for everyone.



Terry Caton (left) listens at a Cakes for the Queen of Heaven gathering in June 1989.

“Rev. Charles said that ritual can be very important. For me, trying new things is very normal, so ritual is not as important to me — but I can respect it and understand it.”

And what do we do today that hasn’t changed from those early years?

Terry laughs. “Coffee hour!”

But the church’s willingness to demonstrate its commitment to inclusion may be what is most meaningful to Terry, who has felt nurtured in her own faith development at UUCWC. “I like that our church is so welcoming to everyone. Not only that we have the reputation, but that we actually *are* welcoming! I also like that our church has grown enough that we have programs that are so inclusive that there is something for everyone.”

MARGARET DEANGELIS has been a UUCWC member since 2007. Her interviews with 50-year members Mary Ann Sprenkle and Betsy Young appeared in the Fall 2015 issue of *Crossings*.



It Takes a Village

Yes, the annual UUCWC auction is an important fundraiser for the church. But it's also the most significant event of the year for creating community. You may be surprised how many ways the auction touches people — and how many people it brings together in ways big and small.

Story by **Phyllis Warren**

UUCWC is well known for its tight-knit sense of community and its *esprit de corps*: Our congregants are actively involved in a wide range of activities from the ordinary to the esoteric. Our community life is vibrant and enthusiastic, and our commitment to the church and one another can be seen in various circles and groups, religious education programs for children and adults, social justice work and outreach to the community, and in our overall level of participation in the life of the church.

No activity, however, better exemplifies our commitment to create community — not to mention showcases the amazing talents of our members, engages the spirit, and on top of it all, makes a substantial contribution to the financial health of the church — than the annual spring auction.

The event that so many of us look forward to with excitement began somewhere around 1990, with the obvious intent to raise money for the church. Each year, the auction became more

ambitious, building on the previous year's success. Today, the auction is a complex undertaking involving a large number of people engaged in a variety of tasks that must be planned, coordinated, and executed.

Auction co-chairs Connie Schofer and Jayme Trott direct the undertaking, which in 2015 yielded a net profit for the church of \$44,480 — breaking all previous records. This was made possible by donations from almost 100 members and friends who contributed nearly 300 items, services, or events with a total declared value of close to \$54,000. Jayme notes that because the church had a balanced budget last year, the auction team felt less pressure to beat a number. "It would be great for the church not to be so financially dependent on the auction, but it's good that we as church members can help to contribute to balancing its budget."

Helping Connie and Jayme were more than 20 members of the auction team. The scope of their work spanned a vast range of activities — some obvious and

Bob and Marianne Alt browse the goodies available in the Crossings Room on auction night.



Save the Dates:
April 24,
May 1, May 7

This year, a lot of new people of all age groups have offered to be part of the auction, which co-chair Jayme Trott says is very exciting. For those who have not yet gotten involved in the auction, she extends an invitation to "please join us for fellowship, fun, connections — and ultimately, to benefit the church." This year, the silent auction dates are Sunday, April 24 and Sunday, May 1, and the live auction is Saturday night, May 7.

What it takes to put on an auction

It takes many hands to help with these and many other tasks between now and auction night:

- ✓ Create the boutique, the raffle baskets, and children's programs
- ✓ Design and edit the auction book
- ✓ Set up the Crossings Room and sanctuary for silent and live portions of the auction
- ✓ Check-out at the silent and live events
- ✓ Prepare and serve the food
- ✓ Conduct the live auction
- ✓ Create and set up decorations
- ✓ Set up and monitor the billing, technology, and communication issues
- ✓ Solicit ads for the auction book
- ✓ Generate and value the donations
- ✓ Help individuals think outside of the box about creative ways they can contribute to the auction

And there are many other tasks as well. What can you help with? **E-mail auction@uucwc.org to learn more.**

some that float under the radar but are no less important in making the event “go” (see “What it takes to put on an auction,” page 16). When you add in the number of people who buy items and attend events sold through the auction, the total constitutes a huge proportion of the congregation. It’s not hard to see, then, that the auction is more than just a massive fundraiser for UUCWC; it is equally important as a community-building event that strengthens bonds, helps to forge new friendships through meaningful activities, and creates a sense of cohesiveness that money alone could never buy.

Creating community means sharing yourself — be it your talent for something, your creativity, or simply your company “The success of the UUCWC auction depends directly on the willingness of donors to supply quality items, host events, and offer to share their time and expertise to others in the congregation,” says Connie. Yes, treasures are nice to take home, she says, but “events and services are at the heart of the UUCWC auction, allowing members and friends to get to know each other better as they participate together individually or in small groups.”

When Jayme and Connie began their involvement years ago, June Vogel was the moving force behind the auction and had been for many years. June was active in the auction until the year she passed away, at which time, Connie and Jayme stepped up to take over her responsibilities. Jayme loved working with June and was inspired by her kindness and patience. Jayme’s primary responsibilities now include entering submissions into the database, placing events on the calendar, and editing copy for the auction book. Connie has primary oversight of

planning, marketing, and financial management for the auction, but also contributes to writing and editing the auction book.

Fortunately, the auction team includes some excellent writers and editors who make sure that everything is accurate, consistent, and orderly. As the adage says, the devil is in the details.

One example of the importance of minding the details is in watching for and evaluating scheduling conflicts for events. “Sometimes conflicts are okay, because not all events will appeal to the same audience.” When conflicts are not okay, auction team members may recommend alternate dates for event hosts to consider. Given the number of offerings, this is no small task.

Creating community across the table

Dinners are among the most popular items offered in the auction. “Dinners and activities make a huge difference,” says Jayme. “That’s where the connections take place.”

Some very popular events are offered year after year and are attended by many of the same people. In an effort to open these events to other (perhaps newer or less assertive) auction goers, the team came up with some creative solutions in recent years. Last year, several spots at dinners and other social events were specifically reserved for new members. “Knowing that the auction can be a bit confusing or intimidating for new members, a special attempt was made to include newcomers,” says Connie. The auction team offered information sessions for newbies about the auction and about how to sign up for events, and new members were extended a small discount.

If you’ve lined up to participate in the first hour of the silent auction, then

you’ve experienced the huge crush of bodies around the tables as people jockey to secure a place for themselves at their favorite dinners. For the last two years, the auction team has instituted a lottery system for popular dinners. In the lottery, people buy tickets for the opportunity to purchase a seat or two at one of the dinners. At the live auction, the lottery numbers are announced and winning ticket holders have the option to complete their purchase of a seat at the dinner. “Besides making things fairer, it also raised a few hundred extra dollars for the church,” Jayme notes with satisfaction.

Two of the people offering some of the most sought-after auction events are Kevyn Malloy and Tony Panzetta. Their elegant Italian seafood dinner has sold out quickly each time it was offered. This dinner is challenging to prepare, as most of the five-course dinner has to be prepared immediately before serving. It requires a great deal of cooperation to prevent chaos in the kitchen and competition for the stove. Actually, Kevyn adds, there was a fair amount of bumping into one another and fighting for space, yet it was “so much fun” to do together — chaos notwithstanding.

Kevyn and Tony are proud of how much money their dinners have contributed to the financial health of the church they love. Kevyn said that after three or four years of offering one of their dinners, Holly Bussey said to her, “I’d really like to come to one of the dinners, but we can’t get there fast enough to sign up,” to which Kevyn replied, mostly in jest, “Well, we could always have you and Jim [Sanders] be the maid and the butler.” Holly didn’t hesitate to say, “Yes! We could wash the dishes!” So, for a number of years, Holly and Jim would come to wash the dishes and pots and pans [and grab some of that wonderful cuisine]. That made everything so much easier.” Kevyn thinks for a moment and says, “It really did take a village to put it on.”

Another event offered by Tony and Kevyn is “Poetry and Jazz,” which they started about six years ago. Since then, it too has become very popular. It involved three couples — she and Tony, the Ruekgauers and the Rahns — along with some others. It too was an extremely collaborative event with



Nothing says “community” like a good meal together, such as this French dinner at the home of Andy Kidd and Dianne Ross.



Mike and Heidi Dalzell, Colin Unsworth, and Dianne Ross won drawings for a balloon ride adventure that was donated for the 2013 auction.

PHOTO BY DIANNE ROSS

PHOTO BY SPARKY MORRISON



Marilyn Cichowski and Loren McAlister (right) cheerfully help staff the checkout table on auction night.

people selecting the poetry, choosing readers, Tony playing improvisational piano jazz tunes, and Kevyn and Rollie deciding upon and preparing the appetizers and desserts. Kevyn said that a large “part of the joy and the fun [of doing the event] was collaborating with others.”

Although many of the offerings are intended for adults, some donors specifically reach out to include families. Patrick and Noelle Kahney, for example, along with Bill and Nancy Cox and Loren McAlister, last year offered an event for families that involved teaching youngsters about vermicomposting —

using earthworms to create nutrient-rich, loamy black soil at home. The children loved learning about it and the Kahneys enjoyed offering it, especially since their contribution was intended to cut down on waste and create an environmentally friendly mindset in the children. In addition, the children played games together and the family got to meet people whom they hadn’t known in an informal, relaxed setting.

“It was especially nice, since with three young children, we’re usually so busy, it’s hard to connect with other adults,” says Noelle.” The experience made her and Patrick feel even more a part of this community. “It was interesting and fun, and everyone got into it. It’s a wonderful way to raise money for the church.”

Many members have offered homemade cakes, pies, soups, and breads; gift certificates to popular stores, restaurants, or theatres; lessons in flying, music, computer skills, and knitting or crocheting; massages; concerts and films; hand-carved wooden items and handmade jewelry; paintings and photography; gift baskets; getaways at a condo at the shore or Rev. Charles Stephens’s cabin in the wood of Maine; a screenplay script-reading party; evenings of song; and holiday festivities. You name it, it’s probably been offered. There are far to many

to list all of them, but the range and the number are a testament to the spirit of shared community that infuses this event.

Happy bidders are better bidders

The culmination of all of the flurry of all this activity is the live auction, where part of the fun is not only getting the item or experience you want, but watching others and bidding up the items — knowing that the money they pay is going toward a good cause. Of course, the live auction follows on the heels of a satisfying spread of mouthwatering appetizers, desserts, and beverages that put you in a state of mind in which bidding on big-ticket items becomes just another expression of fun. As Mike Muccioli says, “if you make the food, the people will come.” I don’t suppose the auction planners had any of *that* in mind when they planned the evening this way!

This year, as in the past five years, Mike will be one of the main chefs in charge of the food for the auction. Last year, Jon Holcombe, Barbara Drew, and Heidi Dalzell were also integral to this process, as was Rollie Rahn, who passed away last year and whose oversized personality and culinary skills will be sorely missed. Sometimes people have their own specialties and will prepare them and sometimes people are asked to prepare foods that reflect the theme of the auction, Mike says, but they always strive to be creative and to vary the options so that people are not offered the same foods year after year. Fortunately, this is a congregation that has been blessed with many talented cooks and bakers, so that never seems to be a problem. Outside the kitchen, a separate group of people who are responsible just for the desserts!

In addition to volunteers who prepare and serve the food, expeditors — people who make sure the food keeps flowing from the place it is produced to the place it is consumed — roam the Crossings Room and kitchen floors. Even people who are responsible for food preparation enjoy getting out of the kitchen; you may see them wandering around the floor from time to time to watch people eat and enjoy themselves because “we love the energy of the crowd,” says Mike. “We get satisfaction from seeing people be happy, eating the food we’ve prepared.” Being involved in the auction in this way is a “great way of giving back to the community,” Mike adds, and

in talking to him, it is clear the joy he gets from this labor of love.

The theme for this year’s auction is “To the Next 100 Years.” Lori O’Neil is the graphic designer this year, as she has been in previous years. Auction book covers and posters have been colorful, fun, and attention-getting. For this year’s theme, Lori developed five possible posters, and the team voted on which poster to use. By the time you read this, we’ll be seeing this poster throughout the church, ramping up interest and inviting all of us to participate as donors, servers, purchasers, and diners in this much-awaited experience.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Kevyn’s statement about it taking a village to put on a dinner is just as, if not more, applicable to the auction as a whole: It does require a village — an inclusive village of willing, enthusiastic, creative, hard-working, dedicated, fun-loving and talented people — to make it work. And work it does. The UUCWC auction is a collaborative effort *par excellence*. It is nothing less than a celebration of ourselves: one that builds friendships, strengthens community, fosters skill-building, showcases a wide range of talents and interests, and contributes to the overall health of the church in so ways that go way beyond its monetary value.

Little wonder, then, that as we celebrate our first 100 years this year, we look forward with confidence toward our second century.

PHYLLIS WARREN volunteered to write this story because of how much she has “enjoyed and benefited” from auction events and because “offering items that others enjoy makes me feel even more a part of the church.”



The kitchen crew takes a break from preparing the auction night menu.



To The *Next* 100 Years!

UUCWC's
Annual
Auction

May 7, 2016

Unitarian Universalist Church
at Washington Crossing
Titusville, New Jersey
www.uucwc.org