

# CURRENTS

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE UNITARIAN CHURCH IN WESTPORT

## Of Cathedrals and Dreams



*The Unitarian Church in Westport is a diverse and welcoming religious community, free of creed and dogma, and open to people of all backgrounds and beliefs.*

*WE INSPIRE and support individual spiritual growth.*

*WE CONNECT through worship, music, learning, and caring ministries.*

*WE ACT in the service of peace and justice.*



There is an old tale told of three of the workers building Notre Dame Cathedral. A passerby asks the first one what he was doing. He replied "I am putting in my time laying stones so that I might earn my daily bread" . The passerby walked farther down the wall and asked a second worker what he was doing, "I am laying the stones to build this great wall." Onward still the passerby went to the last man working near the foundation and asked him what he was doing. He replied "I am building a great cathedral to the glory of God!"

Only the last one truly understood the power of creation. None of us build something great alone. Every great building, every great business, every great community such as ours comes from the combined work of many. Each of us has a part to play but what we must remember is the greater prize we strive for. Only together is beauty created and preserved, never solely alone. Even the greatest painters of old had family who supported them, friends who helped them and clients who admired the work they did. Whether we are making art or providing for a family, we are co-creators of beauty.

Unitarian Universalists are co-creators of a theology which begins as a dream and finds realization in what the theologian Henry Nelson Weiman termed "creative interchange" . Each of us brings our dreams and faith to the crucible of a community wherein a common faith emerges. What is our faith here in Westport? As it is so aptly symbolized in our beloved building, we dream of a world free from strife, embracing the metaphors of nature in balance; each of us part of the whole that makes this community so welcoming and healing. Have we finished our creation? No, not yet, but we are well on our way.

Some see the burning of the roof and spire of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, as a commentary on all that is wrong with our world; a beautiful icon of the past destroyed by greed and neglect. I see something else. I see a tragedy that calls on all of us to rise up and rebuild the great cathedral just as it was done so majestically before by those ancient hands. In the rebuilding comes a new hope, a new chance to see the aspirations the Cathedral once stood for – glory, peace and a love for God, broadly defined – as once again rising into reality. Far from a tragedy, I see the rebuilding as an opportunity to rise again from the ashes to a renewed sense of common purpose and humanity. Money alone doesn't build cathedrals, but faith and purpose do.

Our beloved church, this icon to the dreams of our founders, needs the same faith and purpose to achieve its restoration. I hope you will join me in dreaming and renewing our space so that we might boldly inspire those who follow to fulfill those dreams still left to be made real.

Yours Always, John

## “Our country is full... Can’t take you anymore, I’m sorry”

Recently President Trump accused asylum seekers of running a “scam,” as they’re actually members of gangs. “Asylum, you know I look at some of these asylum people, they’re gang members. They’re not afraid of anything... and they say ‘I fear for my life,’ they’re the ones causing fear for life. It’s a scam, it’s a hoax,” he said. “I know about hoaxes, I just went through a hoax.” And he continued, “The system is full. We can’t take you anymore.

Whether it’s asylum. Whether it’s anything you want. It’s illegal immigration. Can’t take you anymore. Can’t take you. Our country is full... Can’t take you anymore, I’m sorry. So turn around. That’s the way it is.”

Seeking asylum is not illegal and you can only do so from within the United States no matter how you got here.

From the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website: “To obtain asylum through the affirmative asylum process you **must be physically present in the United States. You may apply for asylum status regardless of how you arrived** in the United States **or your current immigration status.**”

People-- families, children arriving -- at our southern border seeking asylum are being prevented from entering at legal points of entry. Lacking food, medical supplies, shelter, a source of income they are forced to wait in Mexico for weeks and sometimes months. And the waiting time is getting longer.

The fortunate find a migrant shelter whose capacity is stretched to the breaking point, others huddle together on bridges, sleep on the street, in the cold, vulnerable to the violence they hoped to escape in their home countries.

“We’re not turning people away,” Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Kevin McAleenan declared. “We’re asking them to wait.”

Orwell would be proud of this mumbo-jumbo.

The question is how long can people without resources be forced to wait before the difference between waiting and being turned away is indistinguishable?

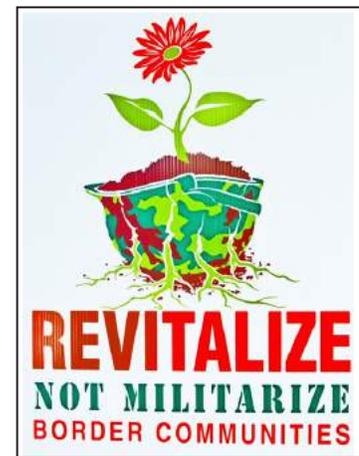
People attempting to enter at a point of entry are told to wait and when they become too desperate to wait and enter crossing the desert they are criminalized as entering “illegally”.

The administration says that it wants to prevent that type of entry but is, objectively, doing everything possible to encourage it.

Albert Einstein said, “The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.”

Those seeking asylum are within the law, those preventing them from doing so are not. What are we to do?

We have an Immigration and Refugee Outreach committee where you CAN do something. Want to know what and how? Contact David Vita at [david@uuwestport.org](mailto:david@uuwestport.org), call 203.227.7205 x14, or just talk to me on any Sunday.



Preparing meals for migrants, KINO Border Initiative, Nogales, Mexico- vita



Immigration activist, Nogales, Mexico- vita

## Pete Seeger & Pat Humphries: *A friendship from first song to last*



*Pete, Sandy and Pat*

Pat Humphries and Sandy O, Emma's Revolution, will be performing at Voice's Café on Saturday, May 11 at 8:00pm and will include songs and stories in celebration of the 100th birthday of Pete Seeger, a dear friend and mentor to the duo. Pete was especially close to Pat Humphries and, here, Pat tells some of the story of their times together.

Tickets are available at:

<https://voicescafe.org/show/emmas-revolution-2018/>

"I met Pete at a songwriters' gathering in 1985. I had written my first song 'Keep On Moving Forward' (then called 'Never Turning Back') the year before and had just finished leading it in a song circle. I saw this hand come around from behind me, holding a small scrap of paper. Pete had notated my song while I was singing it. He asked, 'Is this how it goes?' I don't read music so I asked him to sing it back to me. He had it all right. Pete later said 'Keep On Moving Forward' was the best song he'd heard in 50 years and he and I remained friends for the rest of the nearly 30 years he was alive.

Over those years, Pat performed with Pete in places as varied as Symphony Space's stage in NYC to the dock house in his hometown of Beacon. She worked for the Sloop Clearwater (Pete's environmental project which successfully cleaned up the Hudson River), helped gather sap from the maple trees on his property, visited, shared meals and swapped stories with him and Toshi, volunteered at the local festivals they organized, celebrated holidays and sang at Toshi's memorial. Sandy and Pat later sang at Pete's, too.

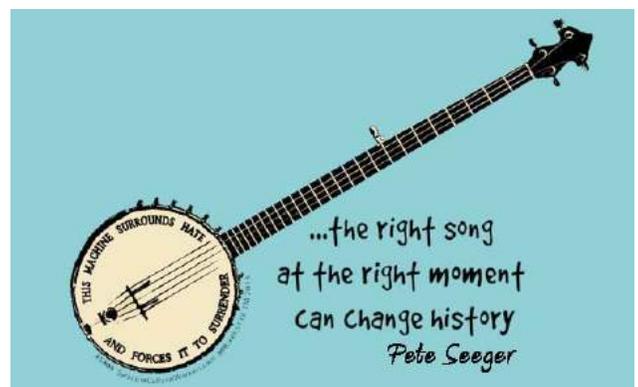
When she heard he was in the hospital, Pat drove up to NY from the DC area, instinctively bringing her banjo, even though she hadn't been playing it much. At the hospital, a steady stream of family and friends were coming through to see Pete and sing his songs

back to him in gratitude for all the times he had left home to sing to us. The day and evening wore on, until just a small circle of family and friends remained. As we sang our last songs to Pete, we sent him off onto his next adventure with our love and blessings.

The family stayed at the hospital and Pat went up to Pete's house to make sure everything was okay there, turned on the lights, and lit the fire from the neatly arranged pile of kindling and firewood Pete had cut and placed in the woodstove just the week before. On the drive up to the house, she had been thinking of all the remarkable ways Pete had touched her life. She took out her banjo and began writing 'Sing People Sing'.

"Pete taught us how to sing together. But he was never satisfied with us singing in unison, he wanted us to sing in harmony. And, if we weren't picking up on a part, he would teach us one. He knew the metaphor of a room full of people breathing in sync and singing in harmony wouldn't be lost on his audiences and that we would take that sense of hope and community out into the world and put it to good use."

**"Oh, hear the banjo ring Hear the people sing Hope changes everything Sing, people, sing" ~**  
from Emma's Revolution's song, "Sing People Sing"



## “Let’s Talk About What’s Going on with Religious Education”



Hello, Dear Ones,

It’s me, Rev. Shelly Thompson, your Assistant Minister for Faith Formation. (Faith Formation is another name for Lifespan Faith Development, which includes in one manner or another, all the ways that we learn, grow and serve together as Unitarian Universalists. Faith Formation is for all ages and stages of our lives.) The Sunday Religious Education programs that are so familiar to most of us are one kind of faith formation that is targeted for our children and youth. As many of you know, the TUCW RE program is going through some difficult changes. As we have seen in UU congregations around the country, the RE program here has declined in attendance and it has been getting harder to fill volunteer spots. It is important to recognize that the challenges we have with the Religious Education program are not due to some failing in the congregation or leadership. They are a result of the fast-paced change of our culture and the changing ways that families spend their precious over-scheduled time. The reality of modern families is that the old RE model just isn’t the best fit for our busy lives or the long-term health of our congregations. In no way does the current social climate’s need for new ways of doing things mitigate or cast dispersion on the fabulous programs and wonderful benefits of RE past and present. We have wonderful volunteers who understand that working with our kids is true ministry. I continue to be impressed with the amazing talent and dedication of the many many congregants who have given decades of service to the children and youth of this congregation.

To better understand why the RE model isn’t working well any longer, I encourage you to read *The Death of Sunday School and the Future of Faith Formation*, by Kim Sweeney. <https://tinyurl.com/y8agk69a> In her introduction, Kim says,

*“Changes in demographics, family structures, societal norms, and the role of the church in US life have evolved drastically over time. Yet the Sunday school model that came out of the twentieth century has remained relatively unchanged. Families report having to choose between spending time together or going to church and being separated. Participation in religious communities should not require families to have to sacrifice their time with one another by being shuffled in opposite directions once they enter the door. Competing priorities, generational shifts, cultural attitudes, and norms about church—coupled with local demographic shifts—have resulted in congregations in New England having the lowest percentage of Sunday school attendance in the country.”*

The material presented by Kim can come as a shock especially for those people whose kids grew up in RE and those who have spent those wonderful years of ministry with our children and youth. In response to these challenges, I am leading a team that is participating in Kim’s two-year consulting program, Courageous Faith Revolution. This ongoing process is designed to help us transition from the old Religious Education model towards an integrated family ministry and multi-generational faith formation model and culture. We are fortunate to be

*continued on next page*

geous Faith Revolution. This ongoing process is designed to help us transition from the old Religious Education towards an integrated family ministry and multi-generational faith formation model and culture. We are fortunate to be working on this with three other UU congregations who are making similar changes. We will not simply or quickly change what doesn't work and we will not abandon the programs that do work. We will still have programming for children and youth on Sundays. We will be adding programs for families. We will continue to offer "The Best of" curricula such as OWL, Coming of Age, and Crossing Paths [formerly Neighboring Faiths]. Childcare will still be provided. It will take a long time (years), effort, and creativity in a brave space that allows for experimentation and even some potential for failure to find out how this congregation wants to move forward together in this exciting (and mostly uncharted) endeavor that is Family Ministry. This is all a part of the larger Faith Formation work that the whole congregation is doing together. Our first round of Adult Faith Formation programs this spring have been a smashing success!

Our new Family Ministries will undoubtedly be developed with a lot of input from all of you. I look forward to potlucks, worship services, gatherings, and summer activities that allow us to all get better acquainted and form the connections that build community. Please feel free to reach out individually with stories, questions, concerns, comments, wisdom, humor, or just to get a cup of coffee. Let's talk!

Yours in faith,  
Rev Shelly  
shellythompsonx@gmail.com

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## ***Waiting to Hear from YOU!***

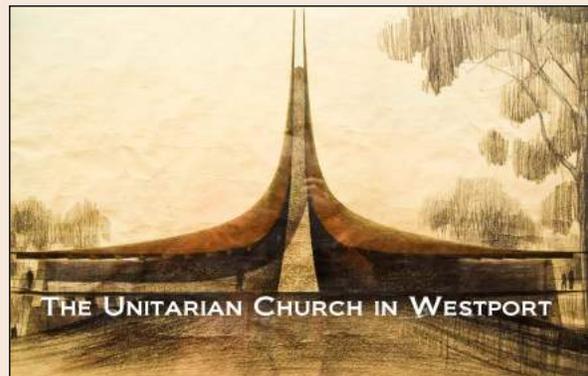
The facebook page "UUwestport" is the online coffee hour for members of The Unitarian Church in Westport. It's a facebook group so only members of the group can post and see what's posted, so whatever you post stays within our TUCW community.

Visit the page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/UUwestport/>) ask to join and you're invitation will be accepted. Then share your thoughts, an article, a piece of music or art, what you're doing, where you're travelling, let people know about a program or event of interest, what's on your mind, ask a question, initiate a conversation. It's your page to share with your community.

We ask that advertisement of commercial businesses, content that is contrary to our UU Seven Principles, and campaigning that directly supports a specific political candidate not be included on the page. That still leaves a lot of terrain to cover!

Let's keep it positive, uplifting and life-affirming. Model what we want to see in our life, in our community. So stop on by, we're open 24 -7- 365 and waiting to hear from you!

If you have any questions about the page please contact David Vita at 203.227.7205x14 or [david@uuwestport.org](mailto:david@uuwestport.org)



*Architect Victor Lundy's sketch of our church*



## "WE DIDN'T LIGHT THE CHALICE"

A Poem by William McEvoy

We didn't light the chalice it was always burning,

One night in '49 the twelve apostles met and planned a church but that  
wasn't their last supper

The Birchers marched outside the Saugatuck School where Chworowsky  
preached,

And little Andrew Wertheim turned the first spade of soil at Lyons Plain

As Lundy's praying hands sought the sky, Westwood worked the boards

And our dream became manifest.

Davidoffs and Lavenders sprang up that spring and Janet Luongo visited,  
but wouldn't come to stay until later

Reverend Steiner liked pernod martinis, while Reverend Spring knew his  
foxtrot from his cha cha.

Speaking of dance Barbara Webster brought it to the Sunday service and  
that worried old Reverend Lane, but it was alright

The Thormahlens came via the Perrys, and that singles group we keep  
hearing about got its start

When Bill and Diana and Sarah arrived the Bells were wrung out to dry.

And they needed to dry because the roof it leaked,

But that drip didn't put out the light in the chalice, it was always burning

Ed Thompson came and decided he'd stay, while Bartlett, Swain, Brewer  
and Howlett they just passed on through

Seems Jane Bickford was always signing people up for something, that's  
how Ann Ford became a Sunday School teacher

Frank Hall came, cut from Emerson's cloth and reciting Frost as if he were old Robbie himself, filled the pulpit and the pews to overflowing.

Remember that leaking roof, well we dreamed of copper but we settled for shingles, fixed the leak but the organ was shot and we had a little to-do about the view. Things got angry. 5555

Jim Cooper found Susan here and married her as soon as she would say yes. The spring flinged, and there were menopausal women in fishnets.

The ground here that little Andy turned (you remember Andy) was fertile ground for growing new ministers, Fast and Haffner, and don't forget Frances down I-95.

Margie came, Margie saw, and Margie left. Things got angry.

We had a vision of 2028 and it was grand. We bought up Sheila Lane in our highest hopes and like most high hopes they fell a little short.

But that same vision saw our way to opening our doors to stand on the side of love, and of that conjured rainbow we let the green come through to color our sanctuary.

Some folks grew restless, they wanted to know when Frank's road and ours would diverge in that yellow wood. A letter was written. An announcement was made. Things got angry.

We reconciled and 18 months of celebration began, as we bid that man farewell and thanks for all the years.

So now we're sweeping our floors and cleaning up the cobwebs, getting ourselves ready for the next chapter in this tale.

You know the Macabees were rightly proud of their lamp's work of eight days, but our chalice has been burning over eight decades. We didn't light it, but damn we keep it shining.

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*Written March 13, 2014 by William McEvoy, member of the Unitarian Church in Westport's Transition Team for Interim Minister Rev. Roberta Finkelstein*

*To be read in the style of the beat poets, ala Allen Ginsberg or Lawrence Ferlinghetti*



## Children's Choir Musical

**On Sunday, May 19th**, the Children's Choir will present a musical titled *Peddler*. This is the result of a semester-long project for which the children have memorized both words and music. They are so enthused about this work because they get to wear costumes, sing, and act. It is also 'play' in a larger sense. It is both fantasy and real at the same time because of the emotions and the energy that they invest.

*Peddler* is based on an old Irish folktale about a peddler (those itinerant persons who did a little bit of everything back in the day). Like similar stories found in other traditions, this version is what Joseph Campbell might call a 'hero's journey'. It has to do with a person who is in need. In order to have that need resolved he/she must leave home and go to a distant city. While there, he/she discovers something about themselves (or their home) that will take them to the next part of their life's journey. In this case, the journey is complex because there are challenges to be overcome. It is through 'wrestling' with the challenges that the hero gains strength, insight and knowledge.

Our cast consists of 17 young people who are enthusiastic about the music, the story and the part that they play. Besides the peddler, you will see, builders, quilters, a Prince, an innkeeper, a mayor, a troll, and countless other characters who come into and out of the scenes. I am not going to divulge the details of the drama and how things get resolved.....you need to come and see for yourself!!

Most importantly one will find their enthusiasm, their team effort and the music uplifting, educational and inspiring. This is a family friendly event. Children will be invited to sit in the front of the sanctuary to be closer to the action. Hope to see you there. **Sunday, May 19th, 11:00am.**



### Join us at our next **ORIENTATION**

**Saturday, June 8 from 10:00am – 1:00pm**



We share our "journey" stories—how we came to be where we are in our life, Rev. John will speak about our Unitarian and Universalist histories and our Seven Principles, and there will be plenty of time for questions and discussion. Please click here [david@uuwestport.org](mailto:david@uuwestport.org) to let me know that you will be attending. Thank you. David Vita

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