



**ALL FAITHS**  
UNITARIAN CONGREGATION

# CONNECTIONS

The Newsletter of All Faiths Unitarian Congregation, *where diversity is treasured.*  
A member of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

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Your Board of Directors met July 21, 2021 in person and on August 18, 2021 via Zoom.

It seems we had just reduced restrictions on All Faiths in-person activities (which had been imposed due to COVID) when the delta variant of COVID-19 started surging. Twice in July the Board tightened mask requirements. Unfortunately, by our August Board meeting the local situation was worse than at any time since the pandemic started. Not only are the unvaccinated getting COVID, there is an increase in breakthrough cases. After assessing COVID-related health risks versus the need of congregants to be together, the Board made the painful decision to close the church to in-person services and meetings to protect the health of our congregation. We will continue to monitor the situation and make adjustments to our policy based upon science

and medical recommendations. Hopefully we can reopen within a few months.

In the last two months, a major Board activity has been to review and revise the draft Reserve Study. The Reserve Study analyzes major maintenance and replacement costs that will occur over the next 30 years. It estimates what those costs will be, when they will likely occur, and how often they occur. Using this information, we know how much money must be budgeted annually to create enough reserve funds to pay for the maintenance or replacement of high cost items when they are needed.

The Board decided it needed a reserve study to meet the fiduciary responsibility requirements of a Board of Directors. We also know that we have costly expenses coming within a few years, such as replacement of air-conditioners, carpeting, roof-

ing, parking lot paving, etc. When some costly items like deck replacement occurs, we can delay doing the project until we have money or find a lower cost alternative. However, you cannot delay replacing non-functioning air-conditioners or fixing a leaking roof. We have to have reserve funds to cover these costs. We have been working with a consultant, who will take our input and provide a final study by October. The study is being paid for by a member's generous gift.

We have looked at our insurance policies and realized that they do not cover some expensive items like our piano and the glass sculpture in the sanctuary. To ensure our insurance coverage is adequate, the Board authorized obtaining an appraisal of our building and contents. The appraisal will cost \$775.

The selection process for a Music Director has been

slower than we originally hoped. It has been difficult to find interested and qualified candidates for the position. In the meantime, ACMA has provided musicians until a Music Director is selected.

We received bids to demolish and replace the deck. The initial bids ranged from \$26,400 to over \$32,000. The Board agreed with recommendations of the Finance Committee to delay replacement while we look at alternatives such as a patio. We have too many costly repairs to afford almost \$30,000 for a deck at this time. A lower cost alternative such as a patio will have lower long-term maintenance costs. However, the cost of permits, demolition, leveling the ground, new steps, and laying pavers will likely cost about \$10,000 and require some significant special donations. The Board would like your input about

*(continued on page 3)*

## Mission Statement

“All Faiths Unitarian Congregation is a welcoming, caring community, seeking diversity, practicing openness, and encouraging personal and spiritual growth.

“We are working toward a just, free, peaceful and compassionate world.”

## All Faiths Collection Schedule

### Monthly Share-the-Plate

*(please write organization and amount in the memo line of your check).*

**September** - One Tree (Climate Action Team)

**October** - Meals of Hope (Holiday Meals)

**November** - Operation Joy (Christmas for Children)

### Special Collections

**December** - Special Collection for Employee Bonuses

*The July Share-the-Plate raised \$213 for Operation Joy - Back to School Part II*

*The August Share-the-Plate raised \$ for Angel Wings*



by Rev. CJ McGregor



Until recently we've been able to stand back from our pandemic vigilance just a bit. We might call it our post-quarantine period. At All Faiths we returned to masked and open services with over 40 people attending on Sundays. After we opened up, we continued to livestream services on Facebook as well as having in-person services. As time goes on, will congregants return to the church or will they opt to stay home as they had to do earlier in the pandemic?....Some of you have shared with me your concern that we may never get people coming back to church. Some of you have shared with me your concern that we may never get people coming back to church after over a year of restrictions. If I'm honest, I'd tell you that I've occasionally shared that concern. My other concerns include keeping people connected, getting people to online programs, and wondering if we will ever return to a packed house, even post pandemic, because of livestreaming. Will we be asked to do church differently from now on and indefinitely?

I'm a bit heartbroken when I'm reminded that the answer is likely yes. I long for the days when we could all be together, when the hymns

were sung with loud and joyful voices, when we could embrace, touch, and truly see one another. The reality is that things have changed. The pandemic pushed us to a place of the future. That is, the way we are doing church now was in our future. The pandemic brought us here far earlier than we expected and I'm not amused.

Although I have concerns, I also see this as a time for us to refocus. Many of us have expressed how this time in our congregational life is a tabula rasa from which to work. During the pause of the quarantine, we are able to think about what truly matters in our congregation and focus on the most critical issues while getting rid of some of the less than meaningful activities. We've learned whom we can depend on—generous supporters like yourself. We've learned about the simplicity of our congregational life and how to do away with some things that we were so attached to that were unnecessary and that were just making work for ourselves.

It seems, because of the pandemic, we have a fresh start. Now we have the opportunity to build on a more sturdy and prosperous foundation. We have an opportunity to lead our congregation to be stronger and healthier than ever. Though I loathe what the pandemic has brought to our congregational life, I am slowly moving toward appreciating the challenge of rebuilding. We can be and do whatever we want. Join me in the challenge.

— Blessings, CJ

## BOARD NOTES (Cont'd from page 2)

replacing the deck. Contact me or other Board members with your input.

Plans are being made for a fund raiser (an auction) to be held in March 2022. Watch for announcements this fall. Be thinking of something special you could contribute that would raise money...perhaps a week at a timeshare or hosting a dinner party.

Comments or suggestions for your Board of Directors can be emailed to All Faiths or by contacting me (239-770-0795 or gcstotler@gmail.com) or other Board members.

*Our next board meeting is scheduled for September 15, 2021, via Zoom, starting at 1:00 p.m.*

## JOYS & SORROWS

*With our apologies for any omissions, here are the joys & sorrows expressed by our members in July & August.*

**Sharon Benner's mother, Ruth,** passed away. Please keep her in your thoughts and prayers.

**Weezie (Louise) Close** reported that her daughter Lindsay has a large tumor in one of her lungs, which will require surgery. She had recently given birth to Weezie's grandchild

**Janet Falk's dear friend, Marty,** died peacefully at home at the age of 84. Keep Janet in your thoughts and prayers

**Ed Kleinow's brother, Bill Kleinow,** died on July 30. Keep him and his family in your thoughts and prayers.

**Dottie Mayol** learned that her cousin Eva has to have a cancerous node removed from one of her kidneys. Keep her in your thoughts and prayers.

**Nicole and Jennifer McDaigle** welcomed their new daughter, Waverly, into the world on August 2. Their daughter, Quillen, was recently hospitalized. They appreciate your prayers and support.

**Mary Ellen Taylor** shared that her cancer has spread to her lungs, liver, bones, and other places. She had a complicated angiogram and those complications have slowed her cancer treatment. Keep her in your thoughts and prayers.

*Joyce Ramay*

**Care and Support Coordinator**

# Happening at All Faiths

*Happy September  
Birthday to you!*



September 07 Brad Davidson  
September 08 Wayne Dean  
September 11 James Kersey  
September 13 Hank Shapiro  
September 14 Edith (Edi) Griffiths  
September 14 Cynthia Edgington  
September 16 Ainsleigh Babcock  
September 20 Roy Kennix  
September 23 Jo-Ann Reece  
September 25 Dottie Mayol  
September 28 Gerald Goen  
September 30 Harold Philpot

*And Coming Up...*

October 9 Lynda Thompson



## Solos Group Events

**Saturday, September 11, 1:00 p.m.**  
House of Omelettes  
4383 Colonial Blvd., Ft. Myers 33966

*Don't lose track of your Solos friends.  
Check your email for details.*

Contact: Annelly Hudanick,  
[annelyblue@hotmail.com](mailto:annelyblue@hotmail.com)

Everyone is welcome to join the Solos  
for outings and lunches.

## **BUILDING YOUR OWN THEOLOGY** Programs are Online - Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m.

<https://zoom.us/j/7787257501>



**Facilitated by Rev. CJ McGregor**  
**September 8,15,22,29**  
**October 6, 13, 20, 27**

Based on the assumption that everyone is their own theologian, this program invites us to develop our own personal credos, the fundamental religious beliefs, values, and convictions that inform and direct our lives. We will come to terms with human nature, ultimate reality, history, ethics and religious meaning.

This is an eight week program and will replace the 10 o'clock scholar program for these eight weeks. You can participate in single sessions or all eight sessions. The program is scheduled in a way so that ALL can participate.

**Session 1 - September 8**  
Doing Theology-A Liberal Religious Model

**Session 2 - September 15**  
Your Religious Odyssey-Autobiography with a Spiritual Twist

**Session 3 - September 22**  
Varieties of Liberal Religious Experience-Unitarian Universalists and the Burning Bush

**Session 4 - September 29**  
Human Nature-Some Self-Understanding

**Session 5 - October 6**  
Ultimate Reality-Creating an Honest God

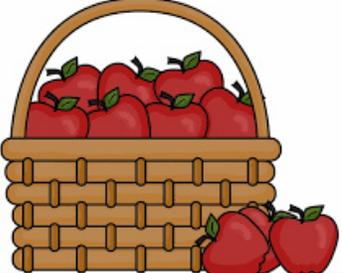
**Session 6 - October 13**  
History-An Honest Backward Look

**Session 7 - October 20**  
So What? Imperatives of My Theology

**Session 8 - October 27**  
Wrapping It Up-A Credo



# SEPTEMBER 2021 CALENDAR

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
An Apple a Day... 			<b>1</b> <b>10 am Zoom</b> Summer Read Discussion w. Joan Marshall & Ensign Cowell	<b>2</b>  <b>7pm</b> Youth RE Zoom Gathering w. Chantel Rhodes	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5</b> <b>9:00am</b> News Talk w. Richard Keelan  <b>10:30am</b> Service & Child & Youth Program on Facebook  11:30 am Talk Back	<b>6</b>  <b>Labor Day</b> <b>Office Closed</b>	<b>7</b>  <b>1:30pm-Zoom</b> Climate Action Team Mtg.  <b>7pm Zoom</b> <i>Lectio Divina</i>	<b>8</b>  <b>6:30 pm Zoom</b> Building Your Own Theology (Pg. 4)	<b>9</b> <b>10 am</b> Zoom Finance Mtg.  <b>7pm</b> Youth RE Zoom Gathering w. Chantel Rhodes	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>  <b>1pm</b> Solos Lunch (Pg. 4)
<b>12</b> <b>9:00am</b> News Talk w. Richard Keelan  <b>10:30am</b> Service & Child & Youth Program on Facebook  11:30 am Talk Back	<b>13</b> <b>10am Zoom</b> Sun. Service Mtg.  <b>12pm - Zoom</b> Book Club  <b>7pm - Zoom</b> Odyssey with Marge DiGalbo	<b>14</b>  <b>10am - Zoom</b> Racial Equity Meeting  <b>7pm Zoom</b> <i>Lectio Divina</i>	<b>15</b>  <b>1pm - Zoom</b> Board Meeting  <b>6:30 pm Zoom</b> Building Your Own Theology (Pg. 4)	<b>16</b>  <b>2pm</b> Homeless Team @ All Faiths  <b>7pm</b> Youth RE Zoom Gathering w. Chantel Rhodes	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>19</b> <b>9:00am</b> News Talk w. Richard Keelan  <b>10:30am</b> Service & Child & Youth Program on Facebook  11:30 am Talk Back	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>  <b>World Peace Day</b>  <b>7pm Zoom</b> <i>Lectio Divina</i>	<b>22</b>  <b>6:30 pm Zoom</b> Building Your Own Theology (Pg. 4)	<b>23</b>  <b>7pm</b> Youth RE Zoom Gathering w. Chantel Rhodes	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>26</b> <b>9:00am</b> News Talk w. Richard Keelan  <b>10:30am</b> Service & Child & Youth Program on Facebook  11:30 am Talk Back	<b>27</b>  <b>9pm</b> ACMA Feed Florida Concert (pg. 11)	<b>28</b>  <b>7pm Zoom</b> <i>Lectio Divina</i>	<b>29</b>  <b>6:30 pm Zoom</b> Building Your Own Theology (Pg. 4)	<b>30</b>  <b>Time to Hide the Nuts!</b> 		
<b>Check the online calendar at: <a href="http://www.allfaithsuu.org">http://www.allfaithsuu.org</a> for post-printing updates</b>						

## SEPTEMBER 2021 SUNDAY SERVICES - "RENEWAL"

*Livestreamed on Facebook at 10:30 a.m.  
(In-House Services Temporarily Suspended)*

Recorded and available at [www.allfaithsuo.org](http://www.allfaithsuo.org)  
or on our YouTube channel

### Sept. 5 – *Qualities of Renewal*

by Rev. CJ McGregor  
Music by Robert Bidney

### Sept. 12 – *On that Day*

by Rev. CJ McGregor  
Music by Robert Bidney

### Sept. 19 – *Loss and Renewal*

by Rev. CJ McGregor  
Music by Robert Bidney

### Sept. 25 – *Human Renewal*

by Rev. CJ McGregor  
Music by Robert Bidney

## SUNDAY PROGRAMS

### News Talk with Richard Keelan

9:00 a.m. on Zoom

### Child & Youth Program

10:30 a.m. on Zoom  
(Confirm Dates on Calendar)



### Talk Backs

### Facilitated by Rev. CJ McGregor

11:30 a.m. on Zoom - Starting in September

What did you think about the message this week? Did it bring up a memory, or did it spur you to change your outlook or your plan for this week? Maybe you have a suggestion or an idea to share. Join in a post-service online chat with Rev. CJ.

## CHILD AND YOUTH PROGRAMS FOR SEPTEMBER 2021

**Sept. 5 - Rev Jacqui Lewis**, Pastor of Middle Collegiate Church, a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic church in New York City. Rev. Jacqui cares about us having a better world where immigrants, refugees, Indigenous people, people of color, and LGBTQ people are treated fairly. Love is what matters most.

**Sept. 12 - St. Francis of Assisi** is one of the most popular saints, widely known for his love of animals and his advocacy for the poor. Francis viewed all creatures as fellow children of God, even animals and birds.

**Sept. 19 - Rumi**, the thirteenth-century Persian poet and Islamic scholar. Rumi has been described as the "most popular poet" and the "best selling poet" in the United States. Rumi's work is still widely spread on social media transcending generations. He is typically referred to as a mystic, a saint, a Sufi, an enlightened man.

**Sept. 26 - Megan Roher**, is an American pastor, bishop-elect, and activist. Rohrer (who uses gender-neutral singular 'they' pronouns) is the first openly transgender minister to be ordained by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

## STAYING ENGAGED AT ALL FAITHS

Don't miss out on our programs and keeping in touch with one another. *Zoom* is a very easy program to use. If you receive emails from All Faiths, you can use Zoom with ease.

In advance of each Zoom program, we email a "link." All you need to do is click on that link and it will bring you into the program. If you are using Zoom for the first time, you may have to click an "install" button, and then it will install Zoom and bring you to the program. If you have problems, just call the office at 239-226-0900, and someone will help you.

Our services are on Facebook. You do not have to join Facebook to watch our live services every Sunday. You simply go to the link: [facebook.com/allfaithsuc](https://facebook.com/allfaithsuc), (note it's allfaithsuc - not uu) and click on the "videos" button. The service should start automatically when we go live.

Still not convinced? All of our services can be viewed, any time, by clicking on the You Tube button on our website, or typing [All Faiths UC Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/allfaithsuc) into your browser.

Please don't hesitate to contact the office for help.

# CLIMATE ACTION TEAM NEWS

by Joan Marshall, Chair



Last month the United Nations released the current report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Most likely you heard about this in the news. Here is the headline from the August 11th New York Times:

## ***A Hotter Future Is Certain, Climate Panel Warns. But How Hot Is Up to Us.***

*Some devastating impacts of global warming are now unavoidable, a major new scientific report finds. But there is still a short window to stop things from getting even worse.*

You can find the article on the internet. Just Google NY Times IPCC. It's an excellent article that succinctly summarizes the report's highlights. We will be discussing this report at our next CAT meeting on Tuesday, September 7 at 1:30. More specifically, we will be discussing the urgency inherent in coping with the climate crisis and how we can best take action in our local community to affect change. Our objective as a Climate Action Team has always been to "make a difference." As this report makes clear, that requires immediate, significant and fundamental changes in how we function on this planet.

It's time to mobilize as a society, with all the energy, creativity and enthusiasm we can muster, and rise to the challenge of restoring the balance of nature that makes life on Earth possible. That sounds grandiose but it's not. It's a practical, common-sense response to the reality of the impact of global warming. We urge you, for the sake of your children and grandchildren, to become a part of the growing movement, both locally and globally, to address climate change and to learn to live sustainably on this glorious planet we call home. Determine how you can best contribute to the climate change movement and join one or more of the groups active here in Southwest Florida. You are always welcome to participate in our CAT meetings. Many of the local group leaders are CAT participants.

Hope to see you at our next meeting.



# ♥ FOR THE HOMELESS NEWS

by Judy Alberda

Our concerns and efforts are still focused on the used bike collection and school uniforms. Bike donations have slowed in the neighborhood. Please alert your community that the need is still at the top of our list so we can help supply transportation to those without. School has begun and shorts and pants are needed for homeless and low income students. Our generously donated congregational funds allow us to supply fresh new uniforms so children can proudly join their classmates in appropriate attire.

An interesting tour and an informative speaker are events waiting to be offered when the danger of Covid has passed. Fruit is still being supplied monthly to the Homeless Drop-in Center of the Salvation Army on Edison.

We are feeling the loss of the camaraderie of Barbara Gaiser, as she has moved away from Fort Myers. She and I were co-chairs of the group for the first two years. She was always creative, engaged, eager and hopeful that the efforts we shared would make a difference in the lives of the needy. We welcome Linda Sullivan as the newest member. All are invited to sit in on our Zoom meetings. New ideas are welcome.



**We are happy to report  
that on September 1  
our mortgage  
balance is down to  
\$71,522!**

**Thanks to Howard Silverman, and  
all of you who have made extra contributions  
towards our mortgage principal. Our goal is to  
pay off the mortgage before a balloon payment  
is due in 2024. Thanks to your generosity,  
we just might do it!**

**Keep up the great work!**

**UPDATES AND EVENTS**

*by Marsha Bates, Team Leader*

This past year, Lee Interfaith for Empowerment (LIFE) made significant strides in advancing social justice for Lee County citizens. Sheriff Marceno has kept the commitment he made at the Nehemiah Action to use mental health professionals to provide Crisis Intervention Training to Lee County deputies. And the number of youth arrested for minor offenses is at an all-time low!

On the Affordable Housing front, the news is not as positive. At the Nehemiah Action, Fort Myers Mayor Anderson committed to having an affordable housing ordinance completed before the end of the summer. At a recent Council meeting Grant Alley, Fort Myers City Attorney, said he has worked on the affordable housing ordinance, but indicated there are still many issues to be resolved. At a recent Budget Retreat, Council endorsed holding a workshop to discuss an affordable housing ordinance, but such a workshop has not been held and is not on City Council's calendar. LIFE has requested a meeting with the new City Manager but has been unsuccessful in scheduling such a meeting. Once again the City has said yes to drafting and considering an affordable housing ordinance, but positive action is being delayed. There is still justice work to be done!

It is time to organize All Faiths' LIFE activities for the upcoming year. This year, All Faiths has three Team Leads: *Lana Cowell, Barb McFarlane, and Marsha Bates*. They will lead house parties and keep All Faiths' network members informed about ongoing LIFE issues.

Each congregation that supports LIFE's social justice actions will hold house parties for their network members in September. All Faiths' house parties will be held via zoom. At those gatherings, participants will share the social justice issues that concern them most. Input from all 18 congregations will be compiled to determine the top three or four issues that weigh most heavily on the hearts of the participants.

Then, at LIFE's October 5 Fall Assembly, network members will vote on which justice issue LIFE will research in the upcoming year. Due to the upsurge in Southwest Florida COVID cases, LIFE's Executive Board decided the Annual Fall Assembly will be held via zoom.

When you are contacted about attending a House Party, please say "yes"... and turn your concern about social justice issues into positive action.

**GREETINGS FROM MANO A MANO**

*by Joan Velasquez*

**The Gift of Water**

We send greetings to our All Faiths friends and our thanks for your ongoing support, as we continue the work of Mano a Mano. Although many of us in the U.S. have begun to emerge from the pandemic, Bolivia continues to have one of the highest and least often mentioned COVID fatality rates in the world. Thanks to the generosity of so many, including All Faiths members, we have responded to the urgent health needs by airlifting over 123 COVID patients to life-saving care in urban hospitals and delivered more than 200,000 pounds of PPE, plus oxygen concentrators and related equipment to health care facilities who literally had nothing.

Taking precautions seriously, our staff have also continued to distribute medical supplies throughout Bolivia, build clinics (now 176 are up and running), deepen our largest water reservoir, and prepare to build a school.

Our most recent addition to these major projects is the drilling of deep wells that yield potable water, a very scarce commodity in Bolivia. Within three months of completing our first well, we received requests from another dozen communities, so they too could have a reliable source of safe water.

We have since drilled 21 deep wells while carefully following pandemic restrictions.



*Deep well drilling equipment set-up in Chirusi, Bolivia; found good water at 350-foot depth.*

Our most recent well in Chirusi, Bolivia will provide water for 212 families (about 1,200 people), which will be piped into their houses, a first in any of these rural communities. After tasting the water, Chirusi residents said, "Now we will celebrate Independence Day (August 6), thanking and praising Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) with drinks of water that will make us healthy."

## CHILD & YOUTH PROGRAM NEWS

by Chantel Rhodes, Director

The congregation welcomed the return of our Child & Youth programs on August 8. As you know, CYP was on hiatus during the month of July. On Sunday, August 8th, we resumed our lessons from the curriculum, "Holy Troublemakers and Unconventional Saints." The curriculum makes learning interesting and inspiring by introducing us to figures who change the world.

We will soon begin to integrate the Riddles & Mystery UU curriculum where students will be challenged to think about the 'BIG Questions' in life such as, 'Where do we come from?', 'What happens when we die?' and 'How do I know what to believe?'

One of our primary missions going forward will be to increase awareness and participation in our Thursday evening and Sunday morning gatherings. While I am grateful for the youth who join faithfully via zoom, I believe that there are many others who could benefit from the CYP fellowship.

One of the advantages of the virtual platform is that we can reach and accommodate youth near and far. Here is how you can help: If you have grandchildren, great grandchildren, nieces, nephews or neighbors anywhere in the country between the ages of 6-17, encourage them to join the youth of All Faiths Unitarian Congregation virtually.

Although we are not thrilled about the idea of not being able to hold Child and Youth programs in person due to the rising Delta variant, it is better to exercise wisdom and learn safely from home. Email me at [chantelrhodes1908@gmail.com](mailto:chantelrhodes1908@gmail.com) for information on how students can easily access our weekly discussions, 7-8 pm every Thursday and 10:30 am every Sunday morning. (See lesson plans on page 6).

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## NEW ONLINE DIRECTORY



Now it is easy to access our All Faiths directory. Simply go to our website: [www.allfaithsuu.org](http://www.allfaithsuu.org) and click on the "Member Login" link located in the blue footer on the bottom of every page. Enter the password, then click on the directory. Call the office for the password if you do not know it.

Many names and addresses are not accompanied by pictures. If you see your listing without a photo, please send a picture to the office at [office@allfaithsuu.org](mailto:office@allfaithsuu.org), and we will add it to the directory. If you don't have a photo, call the office and we will be happy to take one for you. **Keep in touch - stay connected.**

## NEW MEDITATIVE PROGRAM BEGINS IN SEPTEMBER



### *Lectio Divina*

Facilitated by Rev. CJ McGregor

Starting in September

Tuesday evenings at 7pm on Zoom

We will use an ancient religious practice of Christian monastics called *Lectio Divina* (Latin for divine reading). This spiritual practice will draw us into deep reflection about some of the source texts relating to the Unitarian Universalist theology of love, compassion, and justice. Monastics have used this practice for centuries to gain a deeper understanding of the Bible and other writings that are important to them. We are not Christian monks, so the practice does not hold the same meaning for us as it does to them. Yet, we can still gain some insight from this practice by reflecting on writings from all faiths and traditions.

*Lectio Divina* has four stages or moments. They are *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*. *Lectio*: slowly reading the text paying attention to what it means. *Meditatio*: reflecting on what these words mean in the context of your life. *Oratio*: reflecting on the text and meditating on the questions what does the meaning of this text in the context of your life cause you to do? and how am I different having read this text? *Contemplatio*: sit in silence of the moment and in appreciation for a deeper understanding.

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## SNEAK PEEK FOR THE WINTER

### *Long Strange Trip*

Facilitated by Rev. CJ McGregor

November 10, 17,

December 8, 15, 22, 29

Program is online at 10:00 am



This program is a six-session series detailing the history of Unitarian and Universalist thought from the beginning of the Christian era to what we know today as Unitarian Universalism. Discussion to follow. You'll get to see actual places and events in our history.

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## ZOOM SUPPORT

Don't miss out on exciting new programs. Call the office at 239-226-0900 if you need help installing and using Zoom. It's easy!

# THRIVING AMONG THE THORNS

*An Inspirational Story by Tomo Hillbo*

*"We don't experience things as they are, we experience them as we are."*

—Anais Nin, paraphrased

My house came with a mess of a garden. It was as messy as the divorce I was going through at the time: a forest of thorny, 6-foot-tall thistles with a rusty fire pit and an old plum tree. Cleaning up this garden and keeping it tidy gave me a sense of control I desperately needed.

For several years I diligently weeded, added plants, grew vegetables, hosted alfresco discussion groups for church and s'more parties for kids. My garden became a healing place for one of my daughters as she recovered from a long illness. Little did I know that it was healing me, too.

I remarried, and when my daughter regained enough strength to launch herself back into life, I took a full-time office job. Gardening time shrunk to zero. My workload is especially heavy during spring, right when Chicago flora wakes up from deep winter slumber. By the time I get through it, it's already July and my garden is too much of a mess to deal with. The space that I had kept immaculate and neat was now weedy and unkempt. Echinaceas were getting weaker and eaten almost to the ground by rabbits.

Bee balms were withering, Russian sage was shrinking, and last spring the old plum tree didn't wake up. I felt so guilty for letting it all go. In three years it reverted back to being a thistle forest, now without the plum tree. I felt defeated. I kept the curtains drawn toward the remnant of my garden.

This year, after the spring madness at work had passed, my husband coaxed me outside to clean up. The ground was moist and we could pull the tall, prickly thistles without much effort. He counted: 291.

To my great surprise, the garden was thriving among thistles and other "weeds." Thriving! Tall, skinny thistles not only didn't shade other plants, but also were acting as support structures for perennials that needed some hand-holding while growing. Pesky creeping charlie turned out to be fantastic ground cover, keeping the soil cool and moist and controlling other kinds of "weeds." Accidental green lantern plants were lifting false indigo. And the echinaceas were growing to be full height, supported and protected by everything around them.

I realized it is my inadvertent letting go that made this wild, interdependent beauty possible. And at that very moment, I knew I didn't need

that sort of control anymore. How liberating it was!

We left a grove of the thistles in one corner—an altar for my husband who loves thistles, and for me to thank them for welcoming me back to their garden.

## Prayer

Spirit of Life, Mother Nature, thank you for reminding us that we are intertwined in something much larger and beautiful and supported by it, even when we can't see the whole picture. Grant us the strength to disrupt our routine ways of thinking and the courage to let go of any sense of control. And may we all learn to love the thistles of our lives. Amen.

## About the Author



Tomo Hillbo serves as the Director of Communications at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago. She is from Japan, a graphic designer, singer, mother, and wife of a Mennonite pastor from Sweden.



## RECIPE FOR WORLD PEACE

Grab a bowl  
Add 2 cups of hope

Take a handful of negative  
And boil it  
'til it's positive

Throw in some good intentions  
Good people, pets,  
and plants

Sprinkle in some nice ideas  
Then mix it all together

Put it in a pan  
The pan goes in the oven

It stays in there until enough peace has risen

Then throw in a bunch of compassion

Take it out  
And dig in  
Eat it  
Share it  
Take it into the world

Doesn't World Peace taste Peaceful!



## TREASURER'S REPORT

by John Conrad, Treasurer

### Balance Sheet: Cash Assets – July 2021

Iberiabank Checking	\$29,927
Iberiabank Op. Reserve	25,035
Live Oak Op. Res. CD	20,779
Raymond James Legacy	37,027
Pay Pal	35
Iberiabank Capital Fund	<u>6,082</u>
Total	\$118,884
Prior Month	<u>113,671</u>
<b>Net Gain</b>	<b>\$ 5,214</b>

### July 2021 Profit & Loss

Operating Income	\$ 17,818
Operating Expense	<u>19,699</u>
<b>Net Loss</b>	<b>\$ (-1,881)</b>

#### Comments:

Revenue/Operating Income increased in July, compared to June. This was a positive sign! Thank you for all of your generous contributions.

The outstanding mortgage principal at the end of July was \$74,981. This reflects significant progress because on April 1, 2019 the mortgage principal balance was \$151,234! Special thanks to all the congregants who have made generous additional donations to “Burn the Mortgage”!! In the last 12-month period, the mortgage balance decreased by \$31,194.

The Board of Directors has authorized a *Capital Reserve Study* to better understand our long-term costs/responsibilities for repairs to the church property (re-shingling the roof, repaving the parking lot, re-painting, carpet replacement, etc.). The goal is to begin budgeting for these recurring expenses on a proactive basis, rather than scrambling to fund them on a case-by-case basis as the need approaches. If All Faiths is able to implement the funding of Capital Reserves, it could begin in the next fiscal year (2022/2023). This Reserve Study expense was subsidized.

In July, \$425 was collected for Operation Joy (Back to School).



## SEPTEMBER'S ODYSSEY MARGE DIGALBO

Monday, September 13 at 7:00 p.m.  
(Check your email for the Zoom link.)



*Marge DiGalbo* has been a member of All Faiths since early 2018. She serves on our Care & Support Team as Parish Nurse, helping Rev. CJ with pastoral care follow-ups. Marge currently serves on our Board of Directors. Let's see what else she has up her sleeve.

Join us on September 13, via Zoom, to learn more. Hosted by Rev. CJ with Q&A to follow.

## ACMA HAPPENINGS



The ACMA Facebook page is updated every Saturday with YouTube or music links from our scheduled artist for that date. Also check out new concerts outdoors at the Alliance for the Arts.

### September 27 at 9 P.M.

Feed Florida (Virtual)

Weekly Benefit for Harry Chapin Food Bank  
featuring Kim Mayfield

### Wednesday Evenings at 7 P.M.

Songwriter to Songwriter (Virtual)

Interviews with host Bill Veach

Check ACMA Facebook or website:  
[americanacma.org](http://americanacma.org) for more info.



## TALENTED WRITERS AMONG US



Congratulations to *Laurie Babcock*, who's short story "Maternity Leave" was just published in *Barren Magazine*.

Laurie (a/k/a Ainsleigh's mom) is a writer from Maine who lives in Florida with her husband and daughter. She was one of ten finalists for Sunspot Lit's 2020 Inception contest, she was shortlisted for the 2021

Blinkpot Award, and her writing will appear in the 2021 National Flash Fiction Day anthology. She will start a low-residency MFA in Writing this June. If you like her work, let her know on Twitter @LaurieLivesAway.

Laurie's story can be read on our Member and Friends Facebook page, or by clicking on the link: [Maternity Leave](#).

## SHARE THE PLATE COLLECTIONS

For several years on the 2nd Sunday of the month, we have offered 10 percent of our Sunday collection to organizations in the community that we support. The organizations were chosen by our Social Justice Teams: Climate Action (CAT), Heart for the Homeless, Racial Equity, Operation Joy, and while there is no Hunger Team at this time, we support local Food Banks. The organizations are approved by the board annually.

Share the Plate is All Faiths' way to let these organizations know they are doing good work in the community and we support them. With COVID disrupting our services and our weekly offertory, we had to initiate a change in the way we collect the donations. If you would like to support Share the Plate, you can mail a separate check to the office with the organization's name in the memo line, or if you write one check, put the amount going to Share the Plate in the memo line. The organizations and the months we collect for them are listed on page 2 of the newsletter each month and announced at services. Your generosity is appreciated by all who benefit from it.

### All Faiths Unitarian Congregation

2756 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers, Florida 33901

Phone: (239) 226-0900 – Email: [office@allfaithsuu.org](mailto:office@allfaithsuu.org) – Website: [www.allfaithsuu.org](http://www.allfaithsuu.org)

**Executive Board:** Chris Stotler, Chair; Rachel Spiller, Vice Chair; John Conrad, Treasurer; Ed Elrod, Secretary; Diane Cartwright, Past Chair.

**Directors:** Marge DiGalbo, Peter Erickson, Eileen Moran, Ernie Reid, Linda Runkle.

**Staff:** Regina Kilmartin, Administrator; Chantel Rhodes, Child & Youth Programs Director; Joe Gayton, Sexton.

**Minister Emeritus:** The Rev. Dr. Wayne Robinson



#### Communications

*Newsletter*

Regina Kilmartin

*Proofreaders*

Carol Elrod

Joyce Ramay

*Social Media & Website*

Regina Kilmartin,

Sharon Gray, Becky Ross

**Adult Education Forums**

**Sunday Service Team**

Joyce Ramay

Richard Keelan

#### Member Services

Fran Way

*Greeters*

Marsha Bates

*Care and Support*

Joyce Ramay

**Finance**

Joyce Ramay

**Stewardship Committee**

Howard Silverman & Janet Falk

**Nominating Committee**

Lisa Leonhardt

#### Sound Technician

Ed Elrod

#### Building and Grounds

Bob DiGalbo

Judy Alberda

#### Social Action & Outreach

*Climate Action Team*

Joan Marshall

*Community Events*

Richard Keelan

#### *Heart for the Homeless*

Barb McFarlane

*Racial Equity Team*

Rachel Spiller

*L.I.F.E.*

Marsha Bates, Lana Cowell,

Barb McFarlane

*McGregor Clinic*

Joyce Schaffer

*Mano a Mano*

Charlotte Blitt

*Operation Joy & Solos Group*

Annelly Hudanick

**Minister: Rev. CJ McGregor - Cell: 508-736-3361**



Deadline for the **October** Issue of *Connections* is **September 18**

(Brief announcements may be accepted later, and will be included *if* space and time permit.)



OFFICE HOURS: 9am to 4pm, Monday–Thurs;  
9am to 12pm, Friday & Sunday.

Congregational Administrator: Regina Kilmartin