
MAY 2023

THE COMMUNICATOR

FOOTHILLS UNITARIAN CHURCH



2023 MLK March



2023 Baby Blessing

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SO WHAT IS OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES UP TO THIS YEAR?

SUE BLOOMFIELD FOR THE FOOTHILLS BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Your Board of Trustees (BOT)*, headed up by President Walter Nash, appreciates the opportunity to update everyone on our activities this year in this reactivated newsletter.

First, some important context: Under policy-based governance, first adopted by congregational vote in 2017, your BOT monitors outcomes, but does not dictate how the outcomes are achieved. The Ministry Team (including staff), led by Senior Minister Rev. Gretchen Haley, achieves the outcomes. They make daily business decisions required to run our large congregation, guided by broad directives from the BOT that define the “guard rails” (i.e., legal/ethical restrictions). The BOT ensures that the Ministry Team has the resources to manage these tasks, and serves as an important source of advice to Rev. Gretchen.

Hence, one of our regular tasks is monitoring the many activities of our church to ensure compliance with those broad directives. Both Rev. Gretchen and the Board members perform this monitoring of a rotating list of activities each month. Another task is what we call linkage work, in order to determine whether our church is achieving the desired outcomes with stakeholders: our church’s current membership, community partners, and the wider Northern Colorado community. To that end, BOT members and Rev. Gretchen have been meeting with our community partners since last fall with the goal of exploring how well our partnership is working for them and to discuss future initiatives.

Your BOT has been regularly involved in discussions with Rev. Gretchen and Director of Finance and Operations Katie Watkins this year on how to strategically address budgetary issues. Managing an \$8 million construction project in an era of ballooning interest rates, as well as unexpected financial repercussions for our operating budget from the pandemic, demanded creative solutions. One such solution was pivoting to member-funded loans to minimize the size of a mortgage with a local bank required by July 2023. Another was the Board's approval of the hiring of an auditing firm (Your Part-Time Controller) to provide auditing oversight of our increasingly complex budget. Your BOT members also served as the de facto Stewardship Team this last fall, working to solicit those all-important annual pledges that enable your BOT and Ministry Teams to craft a responsible budget for the work of our church.

A final important project we are striving to get over the finish line is congregational approval in June of the thoroughly revised Bylaws. Necessitated by the shift to policy-based governance, this major revision has been in the works for more than four years, involving many dedicated Foothills members. Three town halls, whose purpose was to include interested members in the review and discussion of the new Bylaws, have been held over the last month.

Your BOT members welcome any questions or comments you have about our activities and any issue concerning the mission of Foothills Unitarian. See us at church on Sunday or email us at theboard@foothillsuu.org.

*See <https://foothillsuu.org/churchgovernance/board/> for a list of current BOT members.

FINANCE TEAM UPDATE

The Finance Team is made up of Erik Martinson, Tom Rhodes, Jeff Barnes, and Mary Klecan as the BOT liaison and treasurer. The Finance Team meets monthly to review financial reports provided by our new third-party accounting firm, Your Part-Time Controller. This is part of the additional accounting support we have put in place in 2023, as we continue our expansion. For the first couple of months of 2023, the Finance team made recommendations and supported our Director of Finance and Operations, Katie Watkins, as we identified and set up the new system with Your Part-Time Controller. In April, we reviewed the finalized 2022 Financial Statements. We were impressed with the attention to detail and clear presentation of information. If you are interested in seeing the finalized financial statements, please contact katie@foothillsuu.org.

In 2023, we will continue to meet monthly to review budget vs. actual spending, account balances, cash flow, and total financial picture.

NO TIME TO PLAY IT STRAIGHT: AN UPDATE ON Foothills LGBTQ MINISTRY

REV. SEAN NEIL-BARRON

“People ask me sometimes, “Is this a gay church?””

Rev. Victoria Safford wrote these words in 2003, and twenty years later, despite the huge strides made for the LGBTQIA++ Community, they sadly still ring true.

When our congregation began the Be More Gay campaign, the fear I heard most often expressed was three-fold:

First, a fear that a visible and public stance affirming not only tolerance but celebration of LGBTQIA+ people would make our congregation a target for hate-based violence - a fear mostly expressed by non-Queer and Trans people because Queer and Trans people know that our safety is always relative.

Second, a fear that our church would become too gay. That if we centered Queer & Trans people in our church in this way, we would alienate straight people because they wouldn't be able to relate.

Third, a fear that by telling people to be MORE gay, we were somehow forcing straight people to become gay, or cis-people to become trans. Instead of hearing the call of Be More Gay / Be More Trans / Be More Queer as the call to the deepest form of authenticity there is.

These fears were in the small-voiced minority of responses, but they are instructive for us because we are living through a moral panic about gender and sexuality. Right-wing politicians and religious conservatives have mounted a campaign of censorship and propaganda around gender with devastating consequences.

Over 15 states have passed laws restricting healthcare, artistic expression, the ability to play sports, and freedom of access to public spaces for Trans and Nonbinary people. Even Colorado has not been immune to the rise in hate, with four bills introduced in the Capitol, though all but three have so far been resoundingly defeated.

Locally a group of conservative activists whose ultimate goal seems to be to destroy or severely weaken our public school system, has launched a sustained campaign of bullying and harassment towards our Poudre School District for their relatively progressive policies around Queer and Trans issues, as well as targeting local LGBTQIA+ Activists, including myself. It is only going to get worse.

To say I am proud of our congregation's response is a deep understatement. Instead of shrinking back into the closet, we have courageously declared that this is not the time to play it straight and that we need to be a leading ally and accomplice for LGBTQIA+ people in Northern Colorado.

Within Foothills

In February we kicked off our GenderFluent Series where we challenged the congregation to become:

- Curious about gender - yours and other people's - without judgment or assumption
- Conversant learning new vocabulary and ways of thinking and talking about gender. No longer letting fear of missteps stop important conversations.
- Courageous to speak up and fight back against ideas, laws, and policies that tightly define gender or dehumanize Trans and Nonbinary people. Courageous to affirm your gender, whatever it is, and to embrace others.





Drag artist Krisa Gonna showed the crowd how to counteract gender misinformation at a Sunday service in March.

We hosted world-renowned Queer theorist Kathryn Bond Stockton who preached a message of the strange and sacred nature of gender. The series culminated in a service with a performance from local drag sensation Krisa Gonna that equipped everyone with five talking points to counteract gender misinformation.

In April, we launched a pilot small group to explore how Foothills can grow in our capacity to be a Transgender Inclusive Congregation, ensuring that everyone feels welcome and supported at Foothills. The curriculum was created for Unitarian Universalists by the Transforming Hearts Collective, and we will be sharing our findings in the months to come.

Beyond Our Congregation - Locally

Our True You group for gender-expansive, gender-fluid, trans, non-binary kids and their families continues to meet monthly, providing a safe and affirming place for families within and beyond Foothills to meet each other, share stories, and learn together while the kids can play with peers that 'get it'.

Foothills continues to be a strong public presence of active and engaged support for the LGBTQIA+ Community. I have been attending community meetings for the creation of a new community organization to support Queer and Trans folks. Several Foothills staff members and I were present at the Trans Day of Visibility rally in Old Town Square. Our Family Ministry Team - Eleanor VanDeusen, Lauren Farley and I - have spoken at recent PSD Board meetings to affirm the board's trans-inclusive policies despite recent national news attention. Foothills has also coordinated with local faith leaders to attend all upcoming PSD Board meetings to continue our witness and support.

In February, I attended One Colorado's LGBTQ Lobby Day at the Statehouse, speaking to our representatives about why they should vote against the hate-filled legislation that was introduced this session.

Beyond Our Congregation - Nationally

Because there is so much hatred and misinformation being spread online, last month, Foothills partnered with the UUA's Side With Love Campaign to launch the UPLIFTCollective, a group of 12 UUs learning and working together to create trans and queer-affirming content grounded in progressive religious values online. The Collective's first video went viral, with over 10,000 views and counting!

CLIMATE JUSTICE MINISTRY

Our Climate Justice Ministry (CJM) is feeling the wind beneath our wings! The month of April saw many of our efforts start to bear fruit. Our biggest success this month has been building emotional/spiritual resilience in the face of our climate emergency and the growing poverty, inequities, hate, and violence in our culture. Inspired by the book by Joanna Macy, our Worship Ministry created the Active Hope series on Sundays and promoted the weekend Active Hope Retreat, and CJM hosted a parallel book discussion. There will also be Active Hope Journey Groups starting in June.

April is also the Easter/Earth Day season so we additionally a) hosted the film: “The Letter”, b) announced our partnership with local organization Trees, Water and People, and c) worked with the Music Ministry on our first Earth Day Pick-Up Choir!



2023 Active Hope Retreat

Also exciting to report is the launch of our Green Sanctuary Teams! Buoyed by our foundational work – started during the pandemic – to become a certified UUA Green Sanctuary, our Feb 5 gathering launched nine Teams. Currently, these include:

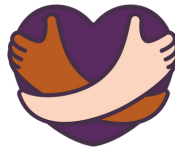
- Garden & Landscape
- Education & Empowerment
- Rooftop Solar for Foothills
- Biking & Car-Pooling
- Climate-Conscious Homes
- Poudre Watershed Health
- Youth Curriculum
- Green Shelter (deepening our connection with Habitat for Humanity)
- Emotional Resilience (continuing the work of Active Hope)

Garden & Landscape Team report: Given that Spring is upon us, this team is already actively planning for the garden season ahead and in discussion on such landscape questions as post-construction erosion control, and future water conservation, pollinator-friendly, and xeriscaping. We also know that the Foothills men's group, The Brotherhood, wants to contribute to this and the Watershed Health efforts so collaborations are springing up, too!

All current Green Sanctuary teams invite your interest and participation. Your questions, creativity, talents, and connections are warmly welcomed. As Green Sanctuary is an all-congregation effort, we are also open to others leading an area of engagement not yet up and running. Direct all queries to the CJM convenor, Gailmarie Kimmel, at gmkimmel@gmail.com.

CARING UPDATE

REV. ELAINE ARON-TENBRINK



With 9 meal delivery campaigns completed, 10 caring kits delivered, and dozens of caring cards sent through the mail, our Caring Team has been busy in these first months of 2023!

Our dedicated Caring Listener Team continues to reach out to offer emotional support and resources to members of our community going through a time of transition, loss, or challenge. Whether it's a one-time phone call, or an ongoing supportive one-on-one connection, our Caring Listeners are doing deep and meaningful work. We still have a couple of spots available on next year's caring listener team. If you're interested, reach out to Rev. Elaine at Elaine@foothilluu.org to begin the application process.



Our springtime Grief Circle, co-facilitated by Rev. Elaine and Joyce Trujillo, has been a weekly gathering of hope and healing for those mourning the loss of a loved one. Using Alan Wolfelt's book "Understanding Your Grief as a guide, we have created a place of reflection, learning, and companionship.

Caring for a loved one who is aging, ill, or has special needs can be both rewarding and challenging. This summer's Caregiver Support Group will offer members an opportunity to share caregiving experiences and provide support to one another. Facilitated by Susan MacQuiddy, this group will meet on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays from 1pm – 2:30pm in June, July and August. Sign up for the group at foothillsuu.org/caregivers.

Our ministers, staff, and caring network are here to support you. You can request care, prayers, or support at foothillsuu.org/caring or by reaching out to Rev. Elaine Aron-Tenbrink at elaine@foothillsuu.org or 970-568-5580.



JOYS & SORROWS

We hold in our hearts

Terri Thorburn as she mourns the loss of her mother, Shari Wiedeman.

Karen Hart as she recovers from a bone marrow transplant for AML leukemia.

Susan Skagen and Larry Maple as they mourn the sudden loss of their 41-year-old niece, Meg O'Neill. Meg died in a climbing accident in Utah, while pushing a fellow climber to safety.

John Bryant as he recovers from a hip fracture from a skiing accident.

Lotte Clarke as she mourns the loss of her beloved grandfather and father figure, Ronald Stanley Charles Bassam.

Bob Hill, who passed away peacefully on January 22, 2023 from stage IV kidney cancer.

We celebrate with

Kara, Michael, and older sibling Jaxson Shobe, who welcomed baby Everett Shobe on January 31.

Melissa Monforti, who, after two years of training, has received certification as a spiritual director.



MUSIC MINISTRY UPDATE

BENJAMIN HANSON

The Music Ministry at Foothills had a great start to the year! One of the highlights so far was the MLK Jr. Day Pick-Up Choir. In January, a group of 40 participants gathered to sing songs of the American Civil Rights Movement, hear the stories behind them, and learn modern-day protest songs from a new generation of musical activists. The Pick-up Choir shared these songs in Sunday services, then brought them into the streets at the Fort Collins MLK Jr. Day March, where Foothills was the largest musical presence in attendance and led community singing all along the march route. The Foothills Choir has continued to thrive and attract new members, with an average attendance of 30 singers in weekly rehearsals and Sunday choral music services.

In rehearsals, the Choir not only practices music but also discusses the theological and philosophical underpinnings of the songs we sing, learning about the historical and cultural context of the music and exploring how it fits into Foothills' wider mission and vision. Some musical highlights from the Choir this spring include leading the congregation in singing "You Are Loved" by Jason Shelton as a part of our GenderFluent worship series and presenting the West African-inspired "It Takes a Village" by Joan Szymko during the Terms of Service series, featuring percussion instruments and Foothills soloist Sara Edwards.

We're continuing to gain momentum with our musical offerings for children, with 20 children registering for our Spring Children's Choir, directed by Kara Shobe. With Kara's leadership and assistance from Foothills volunteers, Children's Choir participants practiced musical skills, played musical games, and performed several songs for All Music Sunday on May 14th.

Our monthly vespers services have provided attendees with opportunities for different kinds of musical experiences. At these evening services, we've sung songs from the Taizé community, meditative music by UU songwriters, chants from earth-based spiritual traditions, and lingered together in silence. Over the summer these vespers services will move outdoors, allowing us to connect more directly with nature as we sing and meditate together.

If you'd like to stay up-to-date on musical happenings at Foothills and opportunities to get involved, you can learn more at foothillsuu.org/music, or reach out to me directly at benjamin@foothillsuu.org. I look forward to making music with you soon!



FAMILY MINISTRY UPDATE

Families are back!

We have seen a huge increase in families at church in 2023, both returning families and a surprising number of visitors! 196 children and youth have attended church since January 2023! Our 10:30 a.m. Church Service has been specially geared towards families with an opening “Community Time” for all ages followed by Small Groups for kids. We offer four groups, ranging from Nursery through Middle School, as well as a High School Youth Group that meets after church.

Our OWL (Our Whole Lives) Sexuality Education Programs

have returned with 53 kids participating in three levels of OWL programs this year! These programs provide honest, accurate information about sexuality, build self-acceptance and self-esteem, foster healthy relationships, and improve decision-making. We couldn't offer these programs without our volunteer leaders - Kelsey DiAstra, Al Stafford, Tom Chandler, and Anne Eakins, with additional support from Eleanor, Lauren, and Amber.

Our popular Children's Choir

is back under the leadership of Kara Shobe. Our Children's Holiday Choir performed for our Christmas services, and our Spring Children's Choir performed at our May 14th All-Music Sunday. We offered a Parent Circle at 9:30 a.m. every Sunday during choir practice for parents to share coffee and community.

Our March Genderfluent Series

provided a wonderful opportunity to support families with LGBTQIA+ children. Our monthly True You Group, led by church members Sally Harris and Jen Wallen, provides a safe space for parents of trans, nonbinary, and gender-questioning children to gather for support and fellowship. We offered a “Grandparents Trying to Understand Gender” group where 17 folks gathered to learn together as we companion our trans and nonbinary grandchildren.

Highlights in the Youth Ministry

include a Youth Habitat Build Project led by church members Dan Seigfried and Katie Kohnen. Nineteen youth and parent volunteers built planter boxes and a doghouse that will be sold to benefit our local Habitat projects. And we were especially thrilled to celebrate ten graduating seniors at our Senior Bridging ceremony during the 10:30 a.m. service on May 7th.

We couldn't be more excited about this upward trend of family attendance at church, and we know we will need more and more volunteers to support our kids as we move into our new building. Did you know that research shows the number one factor that contributes to children thriving is that they have close, long-term relationships with trustworthy, non-parental adults? You could be this adult in a child's life.

If you share our passion for growing future Unitarian Universalists, check out the opportunities to support Family Ministry at foothillsuu.org/family.

Yours in faith and partnership,
Eleanor VanDeusen - Director of Family Ministry
with

Lauren Farley - Family Ministry Coordinator

Amber Lamb - Early Childhood Lead

NEWCOMER MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

With just one quarter of 2023 complete, over **250 new adults and kids have visited Foothills for the first time!** We are honored to welcome them into our community and companion them on their journey of connecting in community, serving in partnership, and deepening in faith at Foothills!



Foothills is dedicated to **offering radical welcome and building a culture of belonging.** Congregants Sara Steen, Mary Klecan, and Teri Ashley are at the heart of our emerging **Belonging Team**, partnering with the Ministry Team to help Foothills cultivate an orientation toward belonging as the core of all we do at Foothills, this summer and beyond, as we move into our new building. Sara, Mary, Teri, and a growing team make sure welcoming guides are at our Newcomer Table every Sunday morning, ready to greet newcomers and companion them as they find their way. This team is present with eyes, ears, and hearts wide open to help meet the needs of our whole Foothills community. There's always something new to learn at the Newcomer table - stop by to grab info on the current worship series; a copy of our **new "Find Your People" guide to Foothills Groups**; inclusive and affirming stickers, art, and bookmarks; updates from community partners; and more!

Since the beginning of the year, **44 people have completed BaseCamp**, our program for those who are new to Foothills, or looking to renew and refresh as they move toward membership.

BaseCamp equips participants with the tools and relationships to connect into our church community, to engage with Unitarian Universalism, and to find a place of belonging in our Foothills mission to unleash courageous love in Northern Colorado and beyond. BaseCamp is a great opportunity to get oriented at Foothills mission and share a day of connection, reflection, and relationship building with other folks on the same path. BaseCamp is offered quarterly as a one-day retreat, and **in January we began offering a special half-day BaseCamp option for parents of young children**, including childcare and follow up Zoom sessions after kid bedtimes! BaseCamp runs next in July. Learn more and sign up to let us know you're interested and we'll send you an invitation as soon as registration opens: foothillsuu.org/basecamp.

We can't wait to welcome all of our newest members in a Welcome Ceremony at our 9:30 AM service on June 4 (also our annual Flower ceremony!)



Enjoying some discussion time at BaseCamp

MY GRANDMOTHER'S HANDS

In May, we will be wrapping up our second year of Somatic Practice Groups, which are gatherings focused on doing antiracist work within our bodies (rather than focusing on our minds, as UUs have a tendency to do). Guided by Resmaa Menakem's book, "My Grandmother's Hands", we focus on identifying and learning to process the embodied trauma of white supremacy that Menakem argues resides in all Americans, passed down from generation to generation.

We have had eight facilitators and 40 participants go through the experience together thus far. We experimented in our first year with folding MGH into the Wellspring structure (making it a 15-session experience), and this year settled on a nine-session experience (two hours every other week). Participants (many of whom have participated in more traditional book studies about race) have described this as a fundamentally different type of antiracism work, enabling them to move to a new level in their understanding of how race operates within all of us. We also regularly hear that the work we do together helps participants learn to process other kinds of personal trauma more effectively (trauma unrelated to racism).

We anticipate this will be an ongoing offering at Foothills; look for more sessions starting in either October or February next year (or maybe both!). If you'd like more information, or are interested in getting involved, please contact Sara Steen (professorsteen@gmail.com).

SLIGHTLY SENIOR SISTERHOOD

The Slightly Senior Sisterhood (SSS) was conceived in 2013 with the purpose of helping senior women (mid-50's into the 90's) meet women in similar stages of life and to connect in deeper relationships. The SSS hosts simple (and ingenious) salad luncheons six times per year (the second Wednesday of every odd month) with the modest aim of members enjoying each other's company. The inaugural luncheon in April 2013 had about 100 women (!) and the ongoing luncheons are still going strong. Since the pandemic, the luncheons of the past year have attracted 35-60 women and have been important to long-term church members as well as to women who recently moved to town and those new to the church. And imagine - we'll be celebrating our 10-year anniversary at the September luncheon!

helping senior
women...connect in
deeper relationships



The founders of the SSS, Linda Beers, JoAnne Powell, Peg MacMorris, and Lynn Young, coordinated the activities in the early years. A second group of core coordinators led the group for the next five to seven years: Ruth Grant, Lola Sorensen, Carol Okeson, and Hazel Short. In 2022, they passed the baton to a third group of core coordinators: Greta Stone, Rani Campbell, Susan Skagen, and recently Janine Davis. Since 2013, our ministers have all connected with this group, and our current ministerial liaison is Reverend Elaine Aron-Tenbrink. Announcements go out regularly to the SSS mailing list, which now totals 170 members.

A few Sisterhood small groups formed in 2013 with the purpose of personal sharing, connecting at a deeper level, and being life-supporting for all involved. Several small groups have formed since (four in the past year), and today there are 10 active small groups of 8-10 women each. Many of these groups meet once or twice per month to focus on a topic important in our lives. The conversations are based on selected readings, podcasts, books, or sermon themes and generally follow a deep-listening model (focused on sharing and listening rather than debating or giving advice). The energetic and committed leaders of these small groups have met twice so far in 2023 to share resources and ideas. The friendships developed in these small groups are long-lasting and often inspire other varied activities among the members. There are currently a few openings in the small sisterhood groups.

For more information on SSS and the sisterhood small groups, contact Greta (gretagay@gmail.com) or Susan (susan.skagen@comcast.net).



Foothills Unitarian
LOVE UNITES US ALL