
JULY/AUGUST 2023

THE COMMUNICATOR

FOOTHILLS UNITARIAN CHURCH



On June 14, we celebrated 15 new members joining the church!



As part of our May 2023 series, Time Well Wasted, we celebrated play and enjoyed finger painting during our Sunday kids small groups!

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*PREPARATION, HOMECOMING &
SANCTUARY EVERYWHERE:
LOOKING AHEAD TO THE SECOND HALF OF 2023, AND BEYOND*

REV. GRETCHEN HALEY

If you've been around on Sundays, or attended one of our many weekday gatherings over the last few months, or been a part of a justice team - you will notice incredible energy and joy. A vibrancy and excitement for being together and the mission we are committed to together. We have seen a strong rebound in our attendance, giving, and engagement numbers over the last few months, which is especially encouraging given that we are only offering two services (and only one service for part of Summer) and in our construction-impacted building and construction-diverted attention.

The first half of this year has sometimes felt like a pot about to boil over, with the construction like the lid that is trying to keep it all contained. Because the construction has created real limitations in what we can and can't do...limitations that sometimes you all just did not want to accept! For example, the senior potluck recently had 70 people in attendance, even though we have basically no social hall. Journey Groups, Sisterhood Groups, the return of the Brotherhood group, My Grandmother's Hands, Earth Based Path, and a Grief Group....to name just a few, have been extremely active over the past few months.

This is all really good news. THANK YOU to our group leaders and everyone who has shown up and pitched in in big and small ways. In this, our 125th year as a congregation, my 11th year at Foothills, and the seventh year in the ministry partnership that Sean and I have with you, I feel that our ministry partnership has never been stronger.

As we look ahead to the remainder of the year, I am thinking about three distinct phases in our path:

1. Preparation: June, July, and August, which includes:
 - a. Moving in and Transitioning Spaces: From the offices to classrooms to the sanctuary itself - moving in and training on our new systems will be a major project that staff will need your partnership to do well, especially given that our Office Assistant Jenna Keim will be on parental leave starting in August.
 - b. Summer of Belonging Initiative: To weave together our many newcomers with our returners into a cohesive community as we all begin anew in our new space, we are committing to a culture of belonging.
 - c. All In For Our Kids: Given the continuing arrival of new families, we will be restarting full programs for children, youth, and families starting this fall, with a special focus on meeting the extensive and particular needs of young people and their parents post-pandemic.
 - d. Continued Organizing and Equipping for Groups and Group Leaders: Groups and teams are a major way we continue to move in personalized relationship and purpose as our community grows and shifts, which makes this work that we began this spring to align and support our group leaders critical preparation for the next stage of our ministry.



we are committing to a
culture of belonging...



2. Homecoming: September, October, and November, including:
 - a. Grand Opening Activities: September 17th will be our first major service in the new sanctuary, which will truly be a homecoming service with a water communion ceremony with fun activities for all ages. September 23rd will be an open house for the wider community, including a more traditional ribbon cutting. Various celebrations and first-times will continue through the fall.
 - b. Next Stages of Belonging: With our learning and work in the summer of belonging as our foundation, we will focus on establishing deeper connections and methods of integration for our whole community.
 - c. Major Fundraising: Once we're in the building, the work begins to finish paying for it! We have a goal to raise at least \$1 million in the coming year and to pay off the long-term debt within five years. We also will be launching our 2024 stewardship campaign in October as we look ahead to the post-construction ministry ahead! And don't forget the first fundraising auction in the new space, which will be on October 14th!
3. Sanctuary Here and Sanctuary Everywhere: December and Beyond
We have spent a long time and a lot of resources investing in this sanctuary for our Foothills community. This fall, we will be at the finish line. We should breathe a much-deserved sigh of relief and spend a lot of time thanking our Building Team and all those who have given financially to make our building possible.

At the same time, we are also on the precipice of a great new beginning. For a long time, we have felt encumbered by not having enough space for our grand vision - and that will no longer be the case.

The end of the pandemic, combined with the energy I described above, all mean that this is a great time for imagination and vision, especially given all that is at stake in our country and world at this time.

I have begun to think about this new beginning by using the phrase Sanctuary Here and Sanctuary Everywhere, which isn't necessarily about our wonderful immigration ministry we call Sanctuary Everywhere. It's more just my shorthand way of describing how we have built this incredible sanctuary here - this literal sanctuary. And then, how this effort will, in turn, allow us to better share the good news and blessing - the courageous love of our mission - with more of our community and in new and more generous ways. I invite you to start thinking not just about the finish line ahead but the starting line and how we will create sanctuary everywhere as we look ahead to December and beyond. I can't wait to see how we will next unleash courageous love together.

Annual Flower Ceremony on June 4 - 2023 marks the 100th year of Flower Ceremony and the 125th year of Unitarian Universalism in Northern Colorado!



SUMMER OF BELONGING

LAUREN FARLEY, ENGAGEMENT & FAMILY MINISTRY MANAGER

In June, we launched the worship series "Sit By Me," exploring our deeply human longing to belong and kicking off a whole Summer of Belonging. We convened a group to begin building our vision of a culture of belonging that will see us into our grand reopening in the new building and beyond! From this early visioning, a "Belonging Team" emerged, ready to partner with ALL of us as we put belonging at the heart of Foothills. As we talked, we noticed that it's so easy and natural to get welcome backward. We start by doing a bunch of things and hoping they influence how we feel, what we think, and what we believe. "If I just stand in the right place, or wear the right button on my shirt, or read the right script, everyone will feel welcome and believe that they belong here!"

But what if it's the other way around, and we need to start with our own beliefs? What if we ask ourselves, "What do I have to believe to be part of a culture of genuine and warm welcome at Foothills?" Imagine the impact of hundreds of congregants all finding clarity on their own beliefs and then acting on them!



Our June 10 Wellspring Brunch for leaders and past participants.
Learn more about Wellspring at foothillsuu.org/wellspring

Members of the Belonging Team said:

“I have to believe...”

- I am personally responsible for being informed, doing the work, and passing on what I know.
- There is room in my life and my heart for someone else’s story.
- The welcome I offer one morning might change someone’s life.
- That *I* belong here.
- That my presence here changes things.
- My behavior tells a story.
- Everyone has a story of how and why they are here, and it's worth knowing.
- Everyone deserves to feel safe here.
- I am not just a guest here; I am a host.
- Relationships born on Sunday matter beyond Sunday.

Just imagine putting these beliefs into practice! How might we show up and say yes to companionship, service, and presence? How can we all become genuine hosts and signal that we are always saving a seat for another to join us? How will we make ourselves available as a source of support, information, comfort, and guidance? How might we actively center the needs and concerns of those who join us here or those who are seeking, searching, and wondering if they have a place here? Share your belonging beliefs and commitments to action at foothillsuu.org/belongingchallenge and join us all summer long and beyond as we connect, celebrate, and grow together. We’re saving a seat for you.



A YEAR OF MUSIC MAKING & COMMUNITY BUILDING

BENJAMIN HANSON, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Wow, it has been an incredible year for music ministry at Foothills! It's hard for me to believe that my first visit to the church was one year ago this week. In the ten months since I started serving as your music director, we have shared so many incredible experiences together. Let's take a moment to appreciate some of the musical highlights of the past year:

In August, the Foothills Choir started up again after a period of dormancy during the pandemic. The choir's first project was preparing music for a celebration of life ceremony for longtime Foothills member and retired choir director Bob Mollison. We were joined by former students of Bob's from around the country, bolstering the choir to over 40 singers, as well as guest musicians from the local Front Range Chamber Players.

In September, we held our annual Water Ceremony at the Drake Center, where a small group of Foothills musicians provided special music for the service, including premiering an original song that Steve Sedam wrote for the occasion.

Later that month, we partnered with the church's Global Peace & Justice Team to host a film screening of "The Singing Revolution," the story of Estonia's non-violent, musical independence movement. Attendees had a chance to learn and sing some historic Estonian and Ukrainian protest songs. In October, we held a follow-up event, the Global Peace & Justice Pick-up Choir, where participants learned protest songs and choral music from around the world, then shared those songs in Sunday services as a call for peace in Ukraine and around the world.



Singing along the rim of the Grand Canyon at sunset

In November, we took our music ministry on the road as a part of the Foothills Grand Canyon Retreat! Every night of the retreat, participants gathered along the rim of the Canyon to sing songs of gratitude and love of nature, and every night we attracted tourists to sing with us who weren't even a part of the retreat! This month also saw the return of our candlelit Vespers Services, which combined prayer, ritual, and music to create beautiful evening worship experiences. These services featured musical meditations that included didgeridoo, drums, various string instruments, and chants from the ecumenical Taizé community.

The holiday season at Foothills was filled with festive music! Worship services in December featured the Foothills Choir and our Holiday Children's Choir, who shared modern and traditional holiday songs for both Christmas and Hanukkah. We also held a special Winter Solstice vespers service with music celebrating the darkness and turning of the seasons, led by the Foothills Madrigals. Services on Christmas Eve were full of congregational songs woven throughout the Christmas story, as well as carols led by youth singers from our community.

Outside of services, a group of Foothills carolers also shared holiday songs and stories with the residents at Columbine Senior Living, another longtime Foothills tradition that returned this year after being on pause during the pandemic.

In January, we held our first-ever MLK Jr. Day Pick-up Choir! This event invited people to sing protest songs from the American civil rights movement, learn the stories behind the music, and explore how the legacy of those songs lives on today. We had a record turnout, with over 40 singers from ages 10 to 90 years old! The singers then shared some of the songs we learned during services on MLK Jr. Day weekend, then took to the streets to sing at Fort Collins' MLK Jr. Day March. Singers from Foothills led singing and chanting all along the route of the march, joining our voices with members of the wider community to call for justice and equal protection for all people.

In February, we launched a new worship series, GenderFluent, which was all about exploring the sacred mysteries surrounding Gender identity and expression. As a part of this series, we welcomed local drag queen Krisa Gonna, who gave an incredible performance in our Sunday services! The Foothills Choir also led the congregation in singing "You Are Loved," an incredible choral anthem with words by our very own Rev. Gretchen. This series was so well received that we have adapted it into a curriculum - including all of the songs, hymns, and special music that were a part of our services - which other churches can use to start conversations around gender in their own communities.



In April, we held the Active Hope Pick-up Choir, part of a series exploring how we can work through climate despair to create meaningful change to protect the earth. The Pick-up Choir learned songs from Earth-based spiritual traditions, climate justice protest songs, and the stirring anthem, “Hallelujah for the Earth.” These songs served as the focal point for discussion around feelings of climate grief and loss and also served as a rousing call to action. Sharing these songs in our Earth Day services with the Pick-up Choir was one of my highlights of the spring!

In May, we closed out the year with an incredible All-Music Sunday! These services were made up entirely of music suggested by members of our community, ranging from folk songs and renaissance madrigals to pop music and original compositions performed by all of our choirs, plus several special groups of singers and instrumentalists. The church was filled with joyous music and with people coming together to celebrate the songs we love. It was a beautiful way to end the season!

Looking ahead, the music ministries at Foothills have so much to look forward to next year! Planning is already underway for special music for the grand opening of our new sanctuary in September, including guest musicians and new songs presented by the Foothills Choir, plus an opportunity to get involved with music for the first services in the new space! In the coming months, I will also have some amazing news to share about the return of the Children’s Choir in the fall, an upcoming musical collaboration between the Foothills Choir and another group in our community, and information about opportunities to perform in an inaugural concert in the new sanctuary!

Thank you for being a part of this incredible year of music-making and community-building at Foothills. I can’t wait to continue singing with you in the years to come!



SUNSET VESPERS SERVICES BEGIN AT SPRING CANYON PARK

BENJAMIN HANSON, MUSIC DIRECTOR

In May, we held our first Sunset Vespers service – an outdoor, evening-time worship service at Spring Canyon Park. We had an incredible turnout (way more than we had expected!) and shared a beautiful evening as a community, singing and moving together in the shadow of the foothills while the sun was setting.

The idea for the Sunset Vespers came from wanting to continue the Vespers services we held indoors in the fall and spring. Those were beautiful experiences full of music, meditation, and silence, and they were well-received by those who attended. However, they depended on the magic of being together in candlelit darkness to create the right feeling for the service. So, we thought: what if we could adapt those services to take advantage of the beautiful evening light and longer days of the summer?

In June, we held a Vespers service all about celebrating the gift of light. The service was a celebration of the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year, led by our Earth-Based Path group. Seventy-seven people joyfully gathered at this Solstice service! Together we danced, sang, and marked the longest day of the year with ritual.

We hope you will join us for one or both of our remaining sunset Vespers services. They will be held on Tuesday, July 18, and Tuesday, August 22. We will gather from 7:30-8 PM at Spring Canyon Community Park in Southwest Fort Collins. These 30-minute services will provide an opportunity to pause, reflect, and share in the beauty of nature together. We will meet in the Southeast corner of Spring Canyon Community Park. Please bring lawn chairs or a blanket.

IMMIGRATION JUSTICE MINISTRY

The Immigration Justice Ministry is building momentum following a period of reorganization and discernment as to the most impactful niche our congregation can fill in this space. A few long-time group leaders have spent countless hours working with other Fort Collins-based community partners, particularly ISAAC (Interfaith Solidarity and Accompaniment Coalition), as liaisons representing Foothills. Their perspective is helping to establish how our community can most effectively bolster efforts to welcome and settle immigrant newcomers.

It is no small task to grasp the complexity of immigration in our country, to say nothing of the full range of physical, mental, and emotional needs that people fleeing their home countries carry with them as they build a new home here in Fort Collins. In order to generate the largest positive impact, we will amplify existing ISAAC programs and fill resource gaps as possible.

In the coming weeks and months, we are focusing on the following areas:

1. ESL Classes for Newcomers: A few organizational partners are gathering resources to provide English language classes and conversation practice for newcomers. Accessibility is a key concern, so we hope to include meal options and childcare for attendees. There are also opportunities to provide tutoring support for students in PSD schools.
2. Transportation Support: Foothills UU members can provide transportation for critical tasks and errands. There is a need for drivers to help out with both local trips, such as grocery pick-ups, and drives to ICE and court appointments in Denver. Interested drivers are eligible to receive accompaniment training, which provides important history, contextual knowledge, and support for how to show up as a nonjudgmental companion.
3. Emergency Shelter Option: Foothills is working in conjunction with other community partners to secure an emergency housing option for folks who are just arriving in Fort Collins. The hope is for this shelter to serve as a short-term solution that is safe, convenient, and welcoming.
4. Spanish Language Practice: Some Foothills UU members are fluent in Spanish, and others know very few words. Anyone interested in supporting the Immigration Justice Ministry can benefit from improving their conversational Spanish speaking skills! We are establishing a regular informal meetup that may grow into a more formal class setting in the future.
5. Immigration Education and Awareness: There is so much to know and understand about immigration that it can feel very daunting to begin on your own. The Immigration Justice team will offer bite-sized background information to help anyone interested to learn more about this system and its many shortcomings, as well as the ways in which local communities are rallying to fill the gaps left by government programs.

Lastly, this team is continuing the work of our amazing Sanctuary Everywhere program as the core team for SE convenes, trains, and sustains villages that are welcoming asylum seekers to Northern Colorado. Affirming the worth and dignity of every person is central to the work of this justice ministry. We are excited to do more to serve vulnerable folks seeking a better life in our community.

Stay in the loop: foothillsuu.org/immigrationjustice.

FOOTHILLS REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE TASK FORCE

In May, the Foothills Reproductive Justice Task Force (FRJTF) surveyed our members to determine their action status. We are 33 strong, with 16 members active online and 10 members active in person. We have other members who are staying informed via email notices.

We also created a covenant statement and identified four SMART Goals. (SMART stands for specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based.)

FRJTF Covenant: We covenant to work collaboratively and actively for reproductive justice in healthcare in the US.

FRJTF SMART Goals:

1. We will maintain confidentiality in discussions and communications.
2. We will educate ourselves, our congregation, and the NOCO community.
3. We will collaborate and act with other NOCO organizations committed to protecting reproductive autonomy.
4. We will assist other UU churches in Colorado and our neighboring states.

At this time, we are focusing primarily on the second SMART goal – education. We identified specific actions/goals for each population:

1. Task Force

- a. Interested FRJTF members will participate in a group Escort Training with Planned Parenthood of Rocky Mountains (PPRM) and volunteer individually as PPRM escorts.
- b. We have had three watch parties for the documentary, The Janes, and will watch another documentary, Birthright: A War Story, together in our July meeting.

2. Congregation

- a. We hope to have our ministers deliver a sermon addressing reproductive justice issues in the future.
- b. We will participate in Northern Colorado Pride events. (Foothills Unitarian is a sponsor of NoCo Pride.)
- c. We have requested a Pick-Up Choir at a future church service with the theme of women’s issues/reproductive justice. Task force members suggested specific songs for the Pick-Up Choir.

3. Individual

- a. We discussed and reviewed books to inform ourselves further on reproductive justice issues. We will generate a Suggested Readings list to post on the Church Center app or on the Foothills Unitarian website.

4. Community

- a. We encouraged FRJTF members to write op-ed letters to local news outlets. The suggested talking point focuses on the prominent billboards in Fort Collins, which are sponsored by groups opposed to abortion. We believe that such “pro-life” groups who are spending \$1200+/month for a billboard ad would provide more service to the community by spending that money on the needs of NOCO children and families.

5. Gratitude Practice

- a. The FRJTF members will write ‘thank you’ notes or emails at our next meeting to our elected officials who have supported reproductive rights in the recent legislative session. We suggest that other members of the congregation also send ‘thank you’ notes if they wish.

To get involved with FRJTF, visit foothillsuu.org/reproductivejustice.



GIVING



\$60K Match

We are delighted to announce a \$60,000 matching challenge for the capital campaign over the summer. All non-previously pledged gifts count toward this match, made by an anonymous donor. If you have been thinking about making an additional gift, or making your first gift, please let us know. We’d love to have your help ensuring we meet the \$60,000 mark. It’s also a great opportunity to invite newer members of our community to join the effort to fund our beautiful new expansion. The match campaign runs through our Grand Opening, September 23, 2023! To make a gift, contact Katie Watkins at katie@foothillsuu.org.

Legacy Giving

Leaving a gift to Foothills Unitarian in your will is one of the most important ways you can help us secure the impact of courageous love activism and the power of liberal religion. By leaving a legacy gift, we have a remarkable opportunity to ensure that these values continue to flourish and shape the future. Our legacies will become enduring symbols of our commitment to inclusivity, justice, and compassion, inspiring future generations.

We'd love to help you think about how to participate in this program. Contact Katie Watkins, our Director of Finance and Operations, or Jane Everham to learn more. If you've already made a plan, we'd love to make sure we have it in our files, as well.

Mark your calendars for July 26, 6-7:30 PM. We'll be offering a free consultation with an attorney about legacy giving at church.



JOYS & SORROWS

We hold in our hearts

Tania Sisel, whose beloved friend, Joe Caballero, passed away on Friday at age 54. May Joe's son Joey, daughter Abby, and all who loved him, be surrounded in love and comfort.

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

We celebrate with

Carol Coffey, who celebrates her 90th birthday, and asks for continued healing wishes after her recent surgery.

Corey Bairre (son of Jeff Barnes and stepson of Jane Smith) and Andrea Workman Hidalgo, who are pleased to announce their engagement. A summer 2024 wedding is planned.



SAVE THE DATE

Sunday, August 6

Return to two services at 8:30 AM & 10:30 AM

August 27-September 9

Ritual Goodbye to Old Sanctuary
(Special Goodbye Service is Sunday, August 27)

September 1-3 (Labor Day Weekend):

Buckhorn Retreat

Sunday, September 17:

Homecoming - Water Communion in Our New Sanctuary

Saturday, September 23

Grand Opening & Ribbon Cutting - For Northern Colorado

Saturday, October 14:

Annual Fundraising Auction



On May 6, we held a bridging ceremony for our six graduating seniors, offering support and celebrating this time of transition in their lives.