
NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023

THE COMMUNICATOR

FOOTHILLS UNITARIAN CHURCH



Senior Potluck is the first Monday of each month, from 5 to 7 p.m.



Family Ministry Kids Circles
enjoying a fun project

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PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT MATTERS MOST

REV. GRETCHEN HALEY

I've been thinking again about the story in Exodus. It's a story I return to often, but lately, I have been having more empathy for the Israelites. That group of people whom Moses led from Egypt and into freedom from slavery that had lasted for 400 years! Finally, they are free - but also, they are not yet in the land of promise. They spend 40 years in the desert, wandering. And while they wander, they grumble and complain and tell Moses that he is a bad leader, that God is not their God, and that even slavery was better than this. I've always had a little bit of judgment for these grumbling people. For their lack of patience and failure to see the big picture. But lately, I've realized I am the Israelites.

As the construction has thrown up one challenge after another, and as we have needed to pivot and change plans over and over, I have found myself thinking that it's almost worse to be lingering this close to done for so long than it would be to just never have begun at all! I've even thought "maybe having three Sunday morning services wasn't so bad. Better than this."

This is ridiculous thinking. Let's be clear. Just walk into the new sanctuary and look up, and you will realize how ridiculous it is to imagine that this land of promise, which we will arrive in, would ever be something not worth wandering in the desert for a while. And still, I've realized that sometimes being almost there for an extended period of time can make any of us start to lose perspective. We can sustain the discomfort and disequilibrium of the in-between for a while, but our brains just aren't built for long-haul instability.

What helps our brains to calm down and stay in the discomfort long enough for the change we are seeking to actualize is to reconnect ourselves to the reason we left in the first place. The bigger sense of why and the things of our lives that matter the most.

There is so much in the world that feels upside down these days. The horrific violence in Israel and Palestine, the nomination of someone who is proud to be “like David Duke” to the Speaker of the House, the rising ocean temperatures and the ripple effects across our whole globe, the housing crisis in our own community... we all could keep adding to this list, I know. But what matters most is not what is broken. What matters is our response. Our steadfast capacity to bring love and kindness, generosity and compassion, creativity and flexibility to our world in both big and small ways. It is our ability to grow in partnership with organizations beyond our own as we work to build a new way forward. A way of life for all. This is the real promised land we’re after.

By the way, it’s not lost on me that this same Exodus story has been used to justify the oppression of the Palestinians for decades, just as it has been used to justify the genocide of indigenous people in our own country. It’s a hardly mentioned part of the story that the promised land was not empty. It was filled with Canaanites already living there, whose lives and worth were discounted by Israel’s belief that the land was meant for them. For me, this is one of the reasons the story is so powerful for us today. Because it is a constant reminder of the risk of entirely centering our own journey, thereby forgetting the many other stories of struggle and longing for freedom that other people and other communities are going through right alongside us. The risk that can lead to the erasure of marginalized voices and the risk that can keep us from the real promise of Beloved Community.

As we continue in our journey, especially as we enter the holiday season, let’s keep looking up and out, continuously widening our circle of concern beyond our own stories and our own discomfort. Let us remember what matters most and turn our attention to that greater why. Our practice of human kindness and our vision of a world where all of us are free.

BUCKHORN FAMILY RETREAT

ELEANOR VANDEUSEN, DIRECTOR OF FAMILY MINISTRY

This past Labor Day weekend, 140 Foothills members gathered at Buckhorn Camp, about an hour from Fort Collins up Rist Canyon Road, for our annual Foothills Buckhorn Retreat.

Foothills members have been gathering at the Buckhorn Camp since the mid-80s, and the Buckhorn Retreat tradition has been passed down through generations of families who have loved the beauty of the place and the community that is created during this beloved weekend retreat.

We were especially excited about the number of new families who attended alongside older members and folks who have been attending for many years. The children and youth love the camp amenities like the gaga pit, fishing pond and game room, and adults enjoy the slowed down pace and sunrise and sunset views overlooking Fort Collins.





This year's Buckhorn participants were divided into Small Groups for several conversations and activities, which gave them the chance to get to know their fellow participants better.

One of our recent additions to the Buckhorn Retreat is our small groups that meet four times during the weekend, giving folks a chance to connect deeply over conversation and simple rituals. It is beautiful to see young children, teens, parents and elders connecting over deep conversations.

Some other highlights of this year's retreat included a Friday campfire sing-along, a Saturday game of Capture the Flag, a bellydance class with Hannah Mahoney, art journaling with Rev, Elaine, a Saturday night gameshow - To Tell the Truth, featuring fantastic true stories from Foothills members and hosted by Unitarianman and Chalice Girl (this year's entertainment was a spin on the Barbie movie). The retreat culminated in a Sunday morning outdoor worship service with a stunning view.

Foothills members ranging in age from babies to elders in their late 80's loved the Buckhorn experience this year! Mark your calendar for Labor Day weekend of 2024 and join us at the Foothills Buckhorn Retreat.



Buckhorn participants enjoyed a nightly campfire singalong with s'mores!



Small groups gathered all over camp, both inside outside the lodge.



The final day of Buckhorn concluded with a church service, looking out over the mountains.

THE FOOTHILLS CHOIR IS NOW WELL UNDERWAY WITH THEIR FALL SEASON!

BENJAMIN HANSON, MUSIC DIRECTOR

The choir started rehearsing in August to prepare music for our annual Water Ceremony services, which had never featured the full choir before. In September, we gathered at Plymouth UCC for our annual fall retreat, where we spent the day singing and socializing to kick off the season with a strong musical foundation and a growing sense of community.

Within these first few weeks of the season, it was clear that the choir was going to look different from last year—specifically, it was going to be bigger! We've had an average rehearsal attendance of over 36 singers each week, and over 60 unique people have attended a choir rehearsal so far this fall. This is a substantial increase from last year, and I expect the group to grow further throughout the year.

Furthermore, we've welcomed 21 new singers who were not a part of the choir last year, many of whom are new to Foothills altogether and are getting to know our community first through their involvement in the choir.

Other than the larger roster, the biggest structural change in the choir this season is the addition of service groups within the ensemble. Members of the choir have stepped up to form teams in charge of various tasks that keep things running smoothly, including room setup, music library management, attendance tracking, event planning, sending caring cards, and even designing and sewing new stoles to match the colors of our new sanctuary. As the choir grows, it is increasingly important to have extra help for tasks like these, and members of our choir have risen to the challenge without hesitation.

Looking ahead, the choir is so excited to sing us into our new sanctuary space once our construction project is completed. We've been working on music to mark the occasion throughout the month, and we can't wait to share it with you! It's been an exciting fall for the choir so far, and there's so much more to look forward to on the horizon.



In September, we gathered at Plymouth UCC for our annual fall choir retreat.

RE-INTRODUCING OUR PODCAST: THE DEEPERPOD IS BECOMING THE TINY SHIFTS PODCAST

REV. SEAN NEIL-BARRON

Did you know that every week Foothills records, edits, produces, and uploads a podcast that is listened to by hundreds of people?

Foothills has been podcasting for almost ten years, but for most of that time, the podcast has just been a recording of the sermon from the past week.

But during the pandemic, we upped our game, making it sound a bit more podcasty, adding conversations and interviews (and sometimes guided meditations).

The results speak for themselves.

Last year, our podcast saw a 53% increase in downloads, seeing a consistent stream of over a thousand downloads each month.

This is big, and we have heard from people around the world who listen in, from Canada to Australia, California to Texas, people who have never heard of Foothills before but are nourished by what we offer here.

Beyond this, we've heard from so many of you that you love the opportunity to listen to a sermon again to let it all sink in (or catch up when you've missed a Sunday).

Harnessing this engagement, we have decided to relaunch the podcast to step into our Foothills mission of "unleashing courageous love in northern Colorado and beyond" with even more commitment to the message and power of our faith.

Introducing the TinyShifts Podcast

The "Tiny Shifts Podcast" keeps what you love about the DeeperPod (including hearing the sermon) but gives us a new sense of purpose that places as our core listening audience both people connected to our Foothills community but also people who appreciate hearing content deeply rooted in our liberal and liberating theology, but who are not connected to Foothills or Unitarian Universalism.

What's New in the World of "Tiny Shifts"?

Action with Every Episode:

Trust in the power of tiny shifts. Every episode introduces a "Tiny Shift" – an actionable step related to the theme that allows you to apply what we are exploring together in real life.

Consistent Thursday Releases:

We are shifting our release day to Thursdays so you can end your week with insights that resonate and inspire.

A Digital Space Just For You:

In our commitment to providing an enriching experience, we're creating a dedicated website for the Tiny Shifts Podcast. Here, you'll find episodes, show notes, and exclusive content that's too good to miss. It will be an easy place to get caught up but also to share the podcast or specific episodes with people in your life who you think appreciate it.

Want to subscribe to our podcast? Head over to <https://foothillsuu.org/podcast>



FAITH FAMILY HOSPITALITY

HILJE KUIPER, FFH CO-LEADER

Faith Family Hospitality (The Overnight Program) is the foundational program of Family Housing Network, and not only affords homeless families safety and security at 15 rotating faith sites but also unifies the greater Fort Collins Community by serving families experiencing homelessness across lines of religion, social status, gender, and race.

Our self-directed FFH volunteer team (currently 72 members), following established FHN Guest and Host Guidelines, provides for the range of hosting duties with a frequency of four weeks per calendar year. The expected stay for our guest families in the Overnight Program is generally up to three months; however, FHN retains flexibility due to the varying stabilization needs of the families upon program entry. In 2023, Family Housing Network helped 119 families, with an 86% success rate of placement into permanent housing and a 100% success rate at retaining these families in permanent housing.

Over the course of the past year, while our church was under construction, we have worked closely with the FFH teams at First United Methodist Church and Plymouth Congregational Church and were able to complete our hosting weeks at their sites. We are looking forward to hosting at our own church again next year!

We are grateful for all the new volunteers and for three new members of our team of coordinators. Currently, we are developing role descriptions to share the work of the FFH team. To improve the connection within our group of volunteers, we have started meetings following each hosting week to share our experiences and look for ways to improve our support to the families we serve. For more information, please visit the Faith Family Hospitality webpage at foothillsuu.org/housingjustice or contact either Hilje Kuiper at kuiperhilje@gmail.com or Marla Nelson at md29md@gmail.com.



Beverages WITH THE Board

Last month, the Board of Trustees convened two events where we could talk with and listen to congregants outside of Sunday services and our regular Board meetings. On September 18th, the gathering was held at Intersect Brewing. Trustees enjoyed the opportunity to converse about various topics, including other folks' experiences with church before they found Foothills and the Board's fiduciary responsibilities with respect to our (almost completed!) construction project. The other event was at Cuppy's Coffee on September 22nd. Over tasty coffee drinks, the Trustees in attendance appreciated the opportunity to discuss Foothills' transition to policy governance and what the church will be like when we move into the new space. Thanks to all who attended these inaugural events, and we hope to see you again at a future gathering.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION: FILLING SPACES AND HEARTS WITH RENTAL PARTNERSHIPS

JENN POWELL, OPERATIONS & EVENTS MANAGER

Even though as I write this we are not yet using our new beautiful spaces, we are filling up all our current spaces with our own multigenerational church programming and with our amazing renters!

Did you know that we are currently at the time I am writing this renting to Fort Collins' beloved theater company OpenStage? They are renting our current sanctuary space for 3 weekends for one of their two annual Etcetera Productions they produce off site in more intimate settings away from their base on the Magnolia stage at Lincoln Center.

OpenStage, who believe theatre opens the heart and mind, reached out to us months ago to see if we could share our space with them for their LGBT+ themed play. They were aware of our LGBT+ work and thought we would make the perfect host. Well, outside having construction issues that had us close our space for a weekend in October, the play was a hit, attracting 60+ people at every performance. As OpenStage is known for picking thought-provoking, heart-opening pieces of art, we hope this is just the beginning of partnering together.

We shared with you earlier in the summer that we have a new tenant, Playcrafter's Kids, renting some of our children's classrooms off of the playground every weekday. They are a licensed preschool as well as an after-school arts program. We love to see these spaces getting used while helping families in our community during the week. Deanna and her team updated rooms 113, 114, and 115 beautifully for their use during the week. Definitely make the time to take a peek on a Sunday the next time you are at church. The Foothills Staff can't say enough how wonderful owner Deanna and her team have been to work with. We have thrown construction complications their way more than a few times and they have been so gracious about all of it, simply put - the kind of partner you want to be working with when something unexpected happens. If you have elementary kids of any age, I strongly encourage you to check out their programs. Their teachers are so engaged with the kids, many of whom you may recognize as actors who perform locally in Fort Collins stage productions.

We have also had the chance to share our space with The Yoga Shack this past summer, who ran a few week-long day camps and now is using a classroom of ours on Poudre School District (PSD) closed days during the school year.

On those monthly PSD closed days, both Playcrafter's Kids and The Yoga Shack offer programs to kids in the district for parents and caregivers who need to go to work. Toni, the owner and lead instructor of the Yoga Shack, leads kids through a day of being present, yoga poses, social and emotional learning games, related crafts, and outdoor time all tailored for your 5-13 year old. Definitely check out The Yoga Shack's website at www.focoyogashack.com.

Our longest current tenant is the Center for Spiritual Living in Northern Colorado (CSL). They have been tenants with us for two years (you may know them by their former name, New Thought). CSL uses our current Sanctuary (soon to be Unity Hall) for their weekly Sunday service at 5 p.m. They share a multi-generational meal together after their service in our social hall, provide programs for their kids and teens, and make beautiful music with talented local musicians, one of which is our own Julie Koenig, who assists Benjamin on piano and voice for us! Their soundboard is now generously shared with us to use in the new Social Hall AV booth space. Rev. Lea and her team have been so patient and flexible with us every step of the way this past year during construction - we are so grateful for their partnership, shared values, and commitment to Love Unites Us All in the Fort Collins area and beyond.

In the next few months, we will soon be using our new spaces. We will be learning this first year what our own needs are on campus - and we will continue to look for other community partners to rent from us that share our values serving our community. Don't hesitate to connect with me about reserving a space for your Foothills small group, your own private event, or connecting me with someone you know in the community who is looking to rent a space. My email is jenn@foothillsuu.org.



JOYS & SORROWS

We mourn the loss and celebrate the life of:

- Beloved long-time church member Evie Weddel who died peacefully on Sunday, October 8, at age 94.

Our love and care surround:

- Savita Krausse, whose sister, Nancy Sherwood, died on July 30.
- Margaret Cottam, whose brother, Richard McQuarrie Cottam, died in August. We extend our love and healing wishes to Richard's daughter, Jessica Vivier, and his wife, Charlene Davenport.
- Mike and Rebecca Parish, as they mourn the loss of Mike's father, Roger, who died on August 30.
- Auggie Winner who is recovering from severe injuries after being injured by a motorist on September 15.
- The Tearman family, as Herman receives treatments for a recurrence of cancer.
- Beverly Lloyd, as she recovers from surgery for cancer.

We celebrate with:

- Bill Timpson and Gailmarie Kimmel, whose daughter, Jayme, was married on October 8.
- Emilea Burton and Taylore Anderson, who were married on September 9.
- Lynn Young, who welcomed a new great-grandchild, Bridger Michael, into her family on August 21





2024 PLEDGE DRIVE



We are ecstatic to be launching our 2024 campaign to work together to unleash courageous love! We would love for you to join us in this work by renewing or making a first-time pledge to Foothills.

Pledges are not legally binding, but they help us to budget appropriately for the year. In 2024, our goal is \$755K in pledged income with participation from 375 households. It will take all of us to get there. If you're wondering how much you should pledge, know that it varies from person to person. We ask you to think about a meaningful gift in support of our shared work, and earlier this year, the Board of Trustees revised our bylaws to include meaningful giving to be a condition of membership. For some people, that is \$20 a month. For others, it's \$2,000. One way we like to think about it is that if Foothills is your home church, consider giving (or getting on a path to give) about 5% of your income.

Your investment in funding our shared work at Foothills means you know you are meaningfully contributing to progressive values in Northern Colorado and creating a welcoming community for all. As we like to say, "Being human takes practice." We are grateful that we get together as well as make our impact together. Our pledge campaign officially kicks off on October 29th - we hope you'll join us!

Pledge today at foothillsuu.org/pledge or learn more at foothillsuu.org/celebrate. If you have any questions, please reach out to our Director of Finance and Operations, Katie Watkins, at katie@foothillsuu.org.

Celebrate Anyway Sunday

On Sunday, October 29, 2023, we gathered to celebrate what we thought would be the first Sunday in our new sanctuary. But life (and especially construction) sometimes throws curveballs. The great news is that for 125 years, we at Foothills have found joy and meaning even in the unexpected, the tough, and the transitions. We celebrate anyway! And that's exactly what we did.



Save the Date!

The Winter Holidays at  Foothills Unitarian



ALL-AGES CHRISTMAS EVE

11 AM ON DECEMBER 24



ALL-AGES CHRISTMAS EVE PAGEANT

3 PM ON DECEMBER 24



Christmas Eve

Candlelight Service
8 PM on December 24th



Foothills Unitarian

HOLIDAY CRAFTERNOON

SATURDAY
DECEMBER 16TH
1:00 - 2:30PM

A fun family event with craft tables for kids 4+ to make holiday crafts to give as gifts or decorate their homes. \$10 donation



Winter Solstice

A special service to mark the turning of the seasons.

Thursday, December 21 at 7 PM



★ Save the Date

Drag Christmas Spectacular ★

Kings, Queens, and other Magical Things Slaying Their Way Through the Holidays

Saturday, December 23
7 pm at Foothills Unitarian

A partnership between NoCo Drag Queen Legend Krisa Gonna & Foothills Unitarian Church

We can't wait to celebrate with you!