

Minister's Board Report

May 14th, 2022

Rev. Dr. Leon Dunkley

North Universalist Chapel Society



Circle round for freedom
Circle round for peace
For all of us imprisoned
Circle for release

Circle for the planet
Circle for each soul
For the children of our children
Keep the circle whole

—Circle Round for Freedom
Singing the Living Tradition, #155

One of the SE kids is in the habit of claiming my stole her own. We have a waving game going right now. I wave at her. She waves at me. Then. We point our fingers at each other. She grabs mine, sometimes and drops her weight. I almost have to carry her. Then, she points at my stole and says, "This is mine."

I respond immediately by saying, "Yes, it is yours." Hearing this, she tends to try to pull it from my shoulders. I have to explain to her that the stole, the symbol of ministerial leadership, represents a



power that belongs to her but that the stole that I wear is belongs energetically to the church and that it is not mine to give to her. It's a heavy concept but she seems to understand and she settle for grabbing her brother and standing with him in front of me while I drape the colorful stole over their shoulders.

Momentum is building in the Spiritual Exploration program. Chloe Powell is doing a wonderful job and the word seems to be getting out. More children seem to be coming to church these days. It is a sign of vitality. Our demographics are challenging. Most of the religious institutions that I know are struggling with RE/SE programs that are populated by only a few children. And now that we are out of the habit of church on Sunday morning, we would do well to strategize about the needs of younger families and prepare a future that can serve their needs.

The said, the SE kids are creating a garden in the backyard. Jonathan and Marie Otsby carried river stones with Chloe to get things underway. Jonathan, Marie and I are in conversation about dedicating their child in the sanctuary on a Sunday morning in June, on the 19th...the day before I leave for General Assembly in Portland,

OR. Kids and families were leaving North Chapel with painted flower pots. It is exciting to see that things are growing.

Momentum is also building with the ministers of the Upper Valley to do some very deep work around understanding our culture(s), our society and our sense of agency within it. The reverends Paul Sawyer, Jan Hutslar, Joan Javier-Duval and myself are entering into the practical planning phases of an exercise/workshop/class that might take place as early as September (more likely, mid-October, considering scheduling). The four of us have been engaged in an on-going conversation in a way that is approaching a turning point and may soon be ready for public engagement.

I am excited and hopeful for the possibility. We will be able to invite people of different perspectives into a healthy conversation about wisdom and education, justice and democracy in a way that does not breakdown into partisan conflict. We are interested in nurturing a public conversation that will allow us to grow, explore, accept, forgive, understand, reconsider, de-escalate, resolve, deepen the kinds of hot-button, cross-fire experiences that have

dominated American culture for years. Together, we will be able to point toward something that is much healthier.

The outdoor service of celebration for David Doolittle is fast-approaching. Richard Schramm is doing a masterful job of organizing for that unprecedented event. The two off-site, memorial services were both quite beautiful—Nancy Gillett Lewis, who was honored at the South Woodstock church and Bruce Montgomery, who was honored at the Orpheum in Boston. Bruce 's name was featured on the marquis of the oldest theater in Boston.

Bruce was the husband of Debby Dean Montgomery. Bruce and Debby were the parents of



Lucienne Dean Montgomery was died in May of 2020 and whose service I led last June. Debby's father, Rev. Harold Dean, was my minister as a child growing up in New Jersey. Harold had three daughters—Debby, Abby and Libby. Libby now lives with her

husband in Nova Scotia. Under terrible circumstances, she and I celebrated 50 years of friendship. My life would not be the same with Libby and her family. Of her beloved niece lost at 27 years of age, she wrote,

So recently your laugh
Like nectar
Butterflies over the flowery meadow

The life you had
Was the path of the honeybee
You gathered nectar
Spread yellowy sunshine
Along the way

Libby's poem was called Light-bringer, the meaning of Lucie's name. Libby is one of the dearest people in my world.



We are here to hold each other, to love each other through the sunshine and through the storms of life. I don't know how to understand the words like "family" or "beloved" if they do not recognize Libby, Debby, Abby, Liz (mother) and Harold in their deepest hearts.

Rev. Jordinn Nelson-Long has reached out to North Chapel to do a pulpit swap n Labor Day. Worship Committee will make that decision at our next meeting. Clara Gimenez is working with North Chapel's GoPro camera in an effort to make it the designated recording instrument in the Sanctuary. Rabbi Haigh has been working with Woodstock Union High School to organize counseling sessions for teachers and advisors as needed. We, meaning our team of Woodstock clergy, have been making ourselves available to the high school in these crazy times.

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