

Minister's Board Report

August 14th, 2023

Rev. Dr. Leon Dunkley

North Universalist Chapel Society

It used to be, "The man drives the car." Now, it's "The car drives the man."

"Richard Goodwin"

Lead Investigator of the Subcommittee on Legislative Oversight

United States Congress

Charged with investigating the Charles van Doren Scandal of 1957

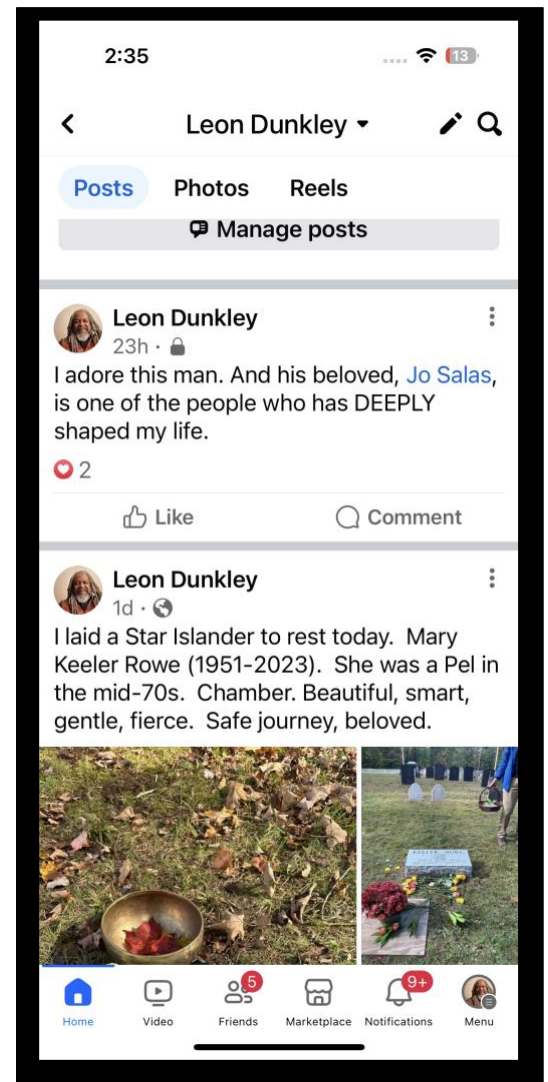
Heart-broken about the loss of life and the continuing violence in Israel and Gaza.

After college, I moved from Boston to upstate New York. I was hoping to start a family. That didn't work out but along the way, I met an interesting man. His name is Jonathan Fox. I met him while we were playing in a pick-up basketball game on the campus of SUNY-New Paltz. Jonathan's wife, Jo Salas, was an arts therapist at the Astor Home for Children in nearby Rhinebeck. The Astor Home is dedicated to saving the emotional lives of court-displaced, New York City children who have suffered ritual abused in the home. At Jo Salas's suggestion (and with her recommendation, if memory serves), I pursued a job at the Astor Home myself. I got that job. Thank you, Jo, both for your willingness to suggest/recommend me for the job and for your coaching about how to do it well.

I am thinking about Jo and Jonathan today because Jonathan recently posted something on Facebook that I found to be quite beautiful. He wrote, I believe that we are here in this life to be creative, to love, and to find joy. My heart is broken at harm to any and all innocents, and I yearn for people everywhere to enjoy democracy and the full range of human rights.

As of 2:50pm on Sunday, October 15th, 233 of his Facebook friends had reacted with emojis—the blue thumbs up, the red heart and the yellow caring face. I am one of Jonathan’s Facebook friends but I didn’t react. I shared his message of creativity, love and joy. I did, as did another six of his friends. I see the post on Carole Oliver’s Facebook page but I can no longer see it on my own. I saw it yesterday. So, that’s a bit unnerving. It troubles me to think that we are being edited.

I may soon shut my page down. I am that uncomfortable. I don’t feel like I control it anymore (at least, not as I once did). This, coupled with how frequently my name and clergy title have been pirated by anonymous email senders has generated some anxiety. I am also mindful of the racist and sexually explicit vulgarity to which an online North Chapel meeting was subjected to during an unsecured Zoom call during the COVID lockdown. These things lead me to feel less confident in social media platforms. I need to reflect further on this subject.



Jonathan Fox is wonderful. He is one of the great teachers in my life. He leads an organization called Playback Theatre. According to its Wikipedia page,

The first Playback Theatre company was founded in 1975 by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas. Fox was a student of improvisational theatre, oral traditional storytelling, Jacob Moreno's psychodrama method and the work of educator Paulo Freire. Salas was a trained musician and activist. Both had served as volunteers in developing countries: Fox as a Peace Corp volunteer in Nepal, Salas with New Zealand's Volunteer Service Abroad in Malaysia.

The original Playback Theatre Company made its home in Dutchess and Ulster Counties of New York State, just north of New York City. This group, while developing the basis of the Playback form, took it to schools, prisons, centers for the elderly, conferences, and festivals in an effort to encourage individuals from all walks of society to let their stories be heard. They also performed monthly for the public-at-large.¹

I could tell you so many stories. In its own way, Playback Theatre is akin to Bread and Puppet.

The point of this sharing is to say that it is becoming increasingly important to own our stories and tell them well. Failing this, our stories will soon own us. Struggling to capture (or recapture) the power to tell one's own story.... What manner of crisis is this, if it is not theological?

What can I say? Even the time away is ministerial.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playback_Theatre#:~:text=Playback%20Theatre%20is%20an%20original,the m%20enacted%20on%20the%20spot.

I have little to report this month, as I am on “summer break” in October. For very good reasons, I have not yet been able to fully put down the work of ministry. Judi Simon-Boutin passed away and the memorial service was held at North Chapel. Delia Clark led that service and it was absolutely wonderful. It was very well attended. So



many people care for Judi. Judi was a maker of quilts and the sanctuary was colorfully adorned with her creations. Quite literally, she gave her warmth to those she loved.

And Juris Kaugerts passed away, husband to our own Diana Perkett. Diana suffered a stroke months ago. She and I visited twice before she was transferred to a different facility after her condition worsened. Diana is currently being cared for by services provided by Presidential Oaks in Concord, NH. I am now planning a visit during my time away from the pulpit in the midst of a busy conference schedule.

While formal services for Juris were held in New Jersey, where he has family, an informal service was held at North Chapel on the 3rd of September. That good Sunday, we celebrated his life and we commemorated his death. Diana's daughter Allison and several members of her family joined the North Chapel congregation that morning. Allison joined me in the chancel for that morning's reflection. Juris is survived by his wife, Diana, by Allison and her loved ones as well as by family with whom North Chapel has never had the good fortune to meet.

And Leah passed away, John and Donna's lovely daughter. Leah Christine Atwood laid herself down gracefully in early August. She was discovered by friends who love her and grieve for her in a beautiful place of which she had good memories. A great many people attended this service as Leah had so many who knew and loved her. They sang to her. They sang a song called "How to Save a Life" by The Fray. They sang,

Where did I go wrong?
I lost a friend
Somewhere along in the bitterness
And I would have stayed up with you all night
Had I known how to save a life

They sang as if a weight were on their shoulders. They were heroic. They were courageous.

Friends and family gathered two days before what would have been her 35th birthday. John and Donna Atwood planned a brave and beautiful service of their Leah, complete with a musical gift from Michael Zsoldos on tenor saxophone. He was Leah's music teacher. She studied flute with him in high school. Through his horn, he sang to her as well. Fittingly, he sang a song

called "In My Solitude," an elegant composition from 1934 by Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington. Through his horn, Michael Zsoldos sang,

In my solitude you haunt me with reveries of days gone by
In my solitude you taunt me with memories that never die
I sit in my chair, filled with despair
There's no one could be so sad
With gloom everywhere, I sit and I stare
I know that I'll soon go mad
In my solitude, I'm praying
Dear Lord above, send back my love

Four of Leah's friends came ready. They entered the Sanctuary having prepared to speak. Several more of Leah's friends who did not come ready and who did not prepare spoke spontaneously, brilliantly, passionately...as bright sunlight burst through North Chapel's western-facing windows, as a ladybug (a spiritual symbol of resurrection) landed on the right hand of her dear friend, Maya. She took the ladybug with her into the pulpit. She made sure we noticed it, made sure that we knew that we were there together and still alive for Leah. Maya spoke with a passion that was worthy of Leah's death...and with a passion that keeps honor with Leah's life.

Diane Mellinger offered beautiful music—during this particular service and at Sunday services and memorial services in general. She responds with artful excellence that lends such gift to those who are prayerful, those who are mourning, those who attend Sunday services.

And Mary Keeler Rowe passed away. Mary was new to the North Chapel community. She reached out to us after receiving a very serious diagnosis. She came to us in part because she was Unitarian Universalist, a member of our sister church in Albany, NY—not far from Schenectady. She

Mary Keeler Rowe



 [Send Flowers](#)

was an LRYer. She was part of the UU youth group at church. LRY stands for Liberal Religious Youth. I was also an LRYer. Mary and I shared that. She was also a Star Islander. She was a Pelican at Star. A Pelican is someone who works on Star Island throughout the summer. I was also a Pelican. Mary and I shared that as well.

What Mary and I shared, though, was only a small part of the reason she came to North Chapel. Mary came because she loves her husband, Steven. I believe the Mary came to North Chapel (I believe this in part, because she said so, herself).... I believe that she came here because of the warmth and the health of this

community. Because of its spiritual promise and its integrity. She was new to this community of ours but hardly new to our faith.

Mary Brandon Keeler left this earth peacefully on August 1, 2023 after a valiant battle with cancer. She leaves behind her beloved husband of 24 years, Steven Rowe of Cornish, NH; her brother and two sisters, Leonard Keeler, Carolyn

Keeler and Beth Chapados. She was also devoted to her nieces, nephew as well as grand-nieces and a grandnephew.²

At her service last Saturday morning in Cornish, NH, her ashes were interred. We scattered dried rose petals in the grave and all around it. We placed freshly cut roses on the stone she'll share with her beloved, Steven.

Lastly, the circle comes right round again...because the stole I wore for that service, the stole that represents this expression of the ministry of North, the stole that carries the artwork and the creativity of Peggy Kannenstine and Veronica Delay, was beautifully sewn together by the loving hands of Judi Simon-Boutin.

It is deeply meaningful that North Chapel is entrusted by so many to offer blessings to the dearest things we know.



I have reached out to Tatum Barnes, our new Director of Spiritual Exploration (and to Joanne) to plan the Story for All Ages which will be a part of the Sunday service on October 29th.

² <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/name/mary-keeler-rowe-obituary?id=52917059>

Last week, I had the great, good fortune to host Emma's Revolution at my home. Sandy Opatow and Pat Humphries are Emma's Revolution, a musical duo who have been performing together in Unitarian Universalist



Roots & Wings

Emma's Revolution

UUCUV
320 Rte 5 South
Norwich

Oct 8, 4:00

Tickets at UUCUV.org

Next, Oct. 21, Sarah McQuaid

circles for the past 22 years (including before thousands at many UU General Assemblies across the country, over the years). Sandy and Pat used to interact with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring. We were friends and neighbors in Maryland. I have quasi-embarrassing crushes on both of them.

Emma's Revolution has often been quoted from the pulpit. They sing are the ones who sing "We Shall

Be Known By the Company We Keep" and they are the ones that sing "We're Gonna Keep On Moving Forward." They sing "Swimming to the Other Side" and they sing about our most recently eclipsed, dear and 'living star.' They sing,

If all the world knew freedom now, now and forevermore
Freedom at the surface and freedom at the core
Oh, the joy within my heart would be so free to soar
And we're living on a living planet, circling a living star

I don't know where we're going but I know we're going far
We can change the universe by being who we are
And we're living on a living planet circling a living star

They performed a concert at the UU church in Norwich, part of their Roots & Wings series. They had good attendance but not great. They were fabulous.

We could have been hanging from the rafters. All three of the Upper Valley ministers were there. Hope Yeager was in the house but, sadly, she didn't make the picture! I say that she was there but what do I know. As a lot of the younger



ones say nowadays, "No pic or it didn't happen." The younger ones can be pretty fierce. ☺ Anyway, we might consider working more closely with them next time. Truly a treat.

I head off on Tuesday for the Annual Ministerial Retreat of the Northern New England Unitarian Universalists. I go from there to Maine to participate in the leadership of a conference and to further deepen our relationship with Sherri Mitchell and Tim DeChristopher. As you may recall, they were our featured speakers for the Brave Light Project at Star.