

Minister's Board Report

Board Meeting—June 17th, 2022

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Minister, North Universalist Chapel Society

The hearings about the insurrection/coup attempt that occurred last year on the 6th of January in our nation's Capitol are finally underway.

They are being ably led by Representative Bennie Thompson who is from a small town in Mississippi and Senator Liz Cheney from Wyoming, the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney.

We were already holding the conflict in Ukraine and the almost 13 million people displaced by violence in the region. We were already aware of the leaked email about the posture of the Supreme Court with respect to Roe v. Wade. We knew about Buffalo, NY and Uvalde, TX and the twenty mass shootings that took place in between around our nation.

We already knew about all of that before we learned about the shooter who was active right here in bucolic Woodstock, VT. Contrary to popular belief, we are not living in a bubble. If ever we were, we're not any longer. Sadly, we have not escaped from anything. Yet, in the face of real adversity, we continued to reach for peace, to reach for oneness, to reach for the best in us becoming possible.

Joanne and I were on the phone, trying to figure out what was happening and what to do about it. I called Joanne right after receiving a message from my dear friend and colleague in Montpelier,

Rev. Joan Javier-Duval. Joan heads for Washington, D.C. this weekend to take part in the march that has been organized by the Poor People's Campaign (Rev. Williams Barber and Dr. Elizabeth Theoharis). Joan is leading a busload of people to the protest to shine light on the fact that poor people (the uninsured and the underinsured) are two to five times more vulnerable to the ravages of COVID-19. A recent Yale study estimates that as many as 338,000 Americans died unnecessarily of COVID-19 and COVID-19-related illnesses. That number accounts for one third of the more than one million people who succumbed to the disease over the last 28 months. A system like Medicare for All would have saved their lives. As Dr. Theoharis explains, our current health care system and...

...the cry and demand for living-wage jobs, for adequate housing, for immigration reform, for protecting this democracy, they're all connected. And we see the interconnections, the intersections of the denial of healthcare, the destruction of our environment, the militarization of our communities, and the problems of poverty and low wages that are infecting almost half of the population, and, therefore, bringing this impoverished democracy to a real crisis.¹

There is so much that can be done and North Chapel is in a good position to make a contribution.

My colleague from our sister church in Montpelier texted right after reading a news report in the VT Digger. I quickly found the same information online, the news that we already know now—that there was a local dispute at 13 Slater Terrace—off Lincoln and behind the Soulfully Good Café, that a local, domestic dispute had escalated and that its danger attracted the attention of the Woodstock,

Hartford and Vermont State Police Departments. Shots were fired in the early afternoon, killing a man in the driveway of the residence. Hours later, shots were fired once again, repelling the police officers who had dutifully and courageously responded. The dispute that began over money ended in deadly violence when 45-year-old Jay Wilson shot 67-year-old Dieter Seier of Cornish in the chest and then, hours later, shot himself to prevent the police from taking him into custody. Why are we unable to resolve these things more peacefully? What force takes over something within us, drawn far more powerfully by hubris than humility, drawn more by desperation than by deference. It might be wise for us to consider exploring the Safe Congregation protocols that have been developed at the



UUA—particularly <https://www.uua.org/safe/buildings/active-shooter>.

Before running an errand for the Thompson Center (and before checking in with Deanna and with Shari), I got ready to pray in the best way that I know how. I packed up a guitar and a portable amplifier and I played on the Woodstock Green. I didn't play for anyone. I played music because my fervent hope is that music heals the world.

While I was playing/praying, I connected Doug Warren, the minister at the Congregational church. We embraced and exchanged

good wishes for each other and for our loved ones. Then, we both got right down to theology. He's a good man. Our traditions of belief are different, of course (par for the course, as a Unitarian Universalist). Yet, there is something beyond that language of our theologies that always reminds us that we are also so much alike. We agree on the need for prayer.

Holy one, shine upon your witnesses—Dieter and Jay. Hold the one and the ones who loved them so. Hold us all, in this time of crisis. Amen.

I have decided not to go the General Assembly this year. I would almost certain become ensnared in the meritless and well-organized chaos that is planned for Portland. I thought that my time and my treasure would be much better utilized here at home. I will rest...which is a very deep need for me at this moment in time and I will invest in a new computer. My professional expenses are better used in this way. I still need to connect with my colleagues. I will have to create that opportunity somehow.

Last Sunday, nine kids took their smiling faces and winsome attitudes downstairs into the SE Rooms and Gardens. This suggests that we need to think about a structure that would support the growing number of little stars that are showing up on Sunday morning. We should strategize as a Board to consider new possibilities. We should be very clear about the importance of



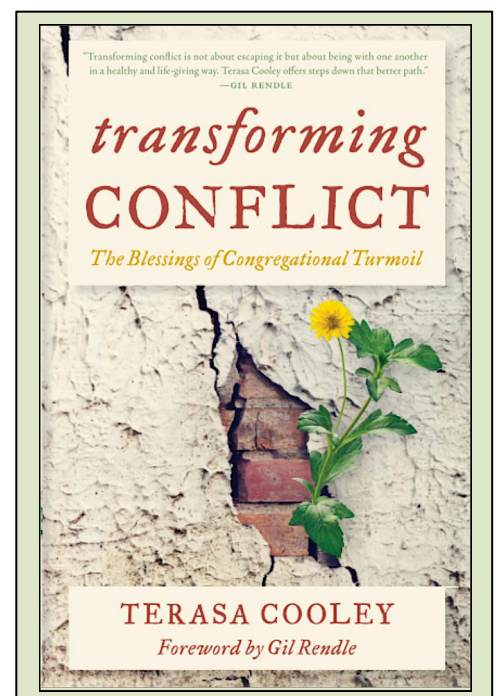
younger families at North Chapel. After dreaming this up together, we will need a task force to create next steps.

I will be researching small group ministry wood-fire cooking classes. I will pick a few meals and

set up sign-up sheets and we create small events together. This is a practice that could go on for many months. It has been suggested that I explore the wisdom of www.truebrickovens.com. Hopefully, I will have some company.

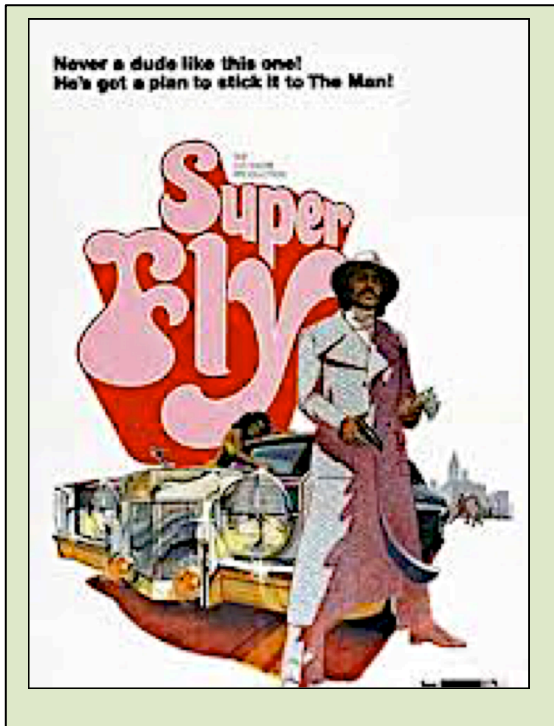
Having preached *The Ghost Pepper Papers*, I would like to explore the inevitable energy of conflict in a different way. Rev. Dr. Terasa Cooley has just completed a book entitled transforming CONFLICT—The Blessings of Congregational Turmoil. It sounds difficult but it's actually wonderful. Terasa is highly skilled and very wise.

Terasa's work might help me/us to develop strategies of conflict resolution that are more useful than the ones that I/we have now. I want to enter this work with there is no presenting issue before us. This way, I know that I can be more playful and creative. For instance, I would like to study conflict in the examples of the monster movies of old. Do you remember Godzilla v. Megalon from way



back in 1973. Maybe conflict could be cast in lighter containers, like monster movies. This way, they don't escalate to unhealthy levels in ways that surprise us...in ways that are dangerous.

I imagine the showing of Independence Day in a way that would allow us to show where Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene gets



some of her pithy quotes. Maybe we could host a discussion of The Gadfly Papers against the backdrop of the original Superfly. I won't go so far as to suggest a fencing match between former First Ladies Michelle Obama and Laura Bush. As much as I would like to see that, they are both too dignified to participate. Each woman would assume that the other would be too elegant to give it a try. But the idea shows that we are working on

being larger than the containers that are cut out for us by current society.

Finally, the North Chapel community did an amazing job of creating a powerful memorial for David Doolittle. COVID presents many challenges—not the least of which being that of creating meaningful memorial services when the possibility of gathering as a community is in question. Yet and still, loving souls came forth so powerfully—Richard Schramm, Anne Macksoud, Chris Bartlett, Anne Dean, Diane Mellenger, Joanne Boyle, Mary Blanton, Gina Auriema



and many more. Kim and Nick and Ashley and Matteo and Bob and others were well served. AND I believe that it was healing for all of us to have chosen such a lovely

way forward in a time that is so filled with challenges.

When I was playing/praying on the Green after the shooting, I found myself drawn to a song called “That’s Alright.” It offered some peace.

Some say Peter and some say Paul
But there ain’t but one God that made us all
And my soul’s got a seat up in the kingdom
and that’s alright
I went down in the valley to pray
My soul got happy and I stayed all day
And my soul’s got a seat up in the kingdom
and that’s alright

I don’t think that I have anything more to add...except to say thank you. Each one of you amazes me.

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¹ https://www.democracynow.org/2022/6/17/poor_peoples_campaign_2022_washington_march