

North Fork Unitarian Universalist Fellowship



Jamesport, Long Island

Newsletter *Fall, 2026*



Love radically, serve gratefully, wonder daily.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS



Our hearts are filled with gladness as we say hello to new members, Marguerite Volonts and Diane Nendza.

They were officially welcomed by Reverend Ben Bortin and the members of the Membership Committee, Annika Shapiro and Bob Benish. Flowers and cake were the final flourishes!

Music of Note

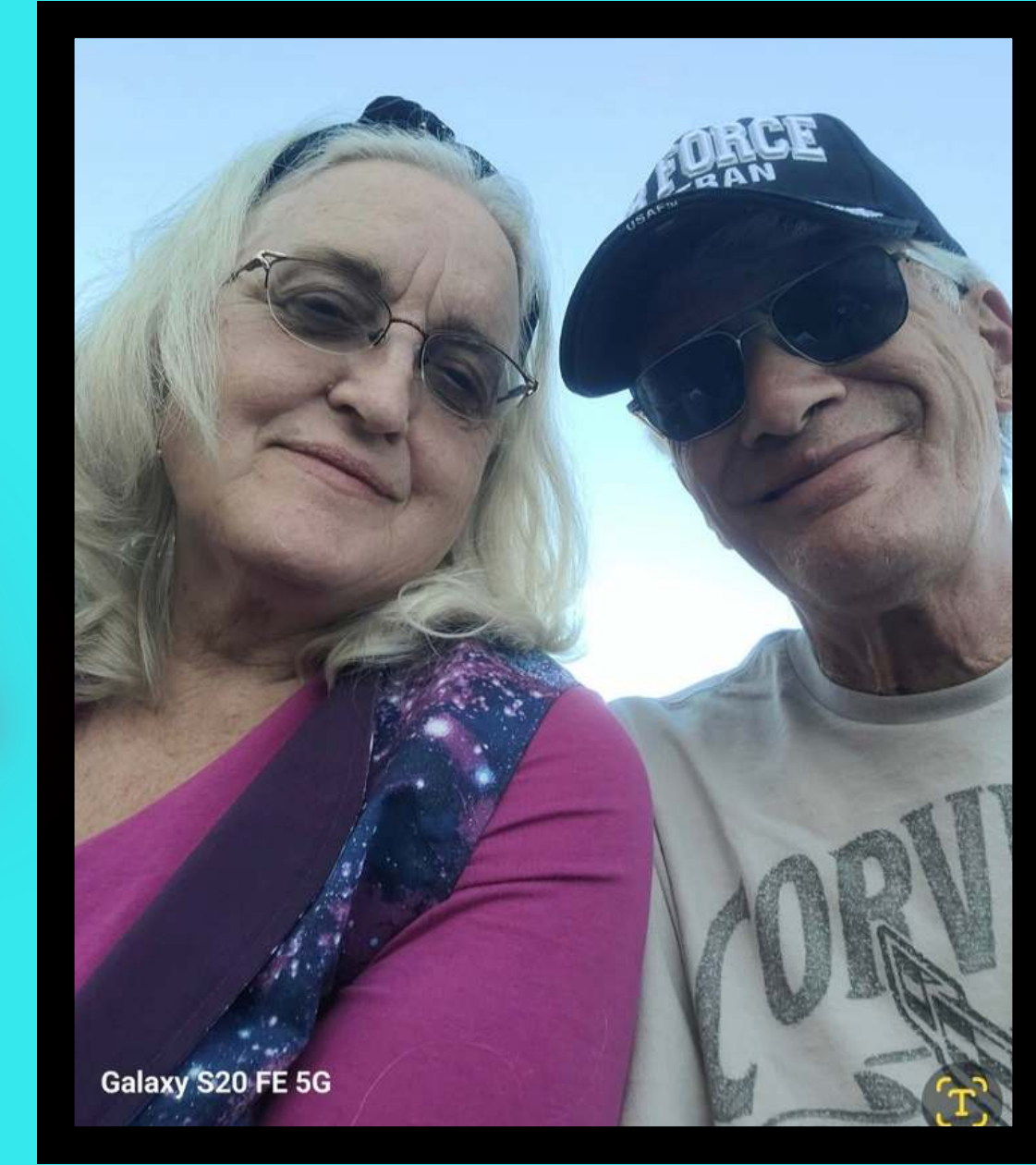
It is always a pleasure to have Liz Yenetchi and Diane Foster as guest musicians. We heard Diane on the viola da gamba, and both Diane and Liz on a variety of recorders. Many thanks for enriching our musical lives!



Getting To Know...

AMY SCHMERSAL

PARIDISE



Tell us a little about yourself...phenotype or genotype? I'm 5'2" tall. Turn 69 in October.

Born in Southampton Hospital. Grew up in Hampton Bays but lived in Maryland for many years. Came back during Covid lockdown and stayed. I have formal education in History and Science.

What brought you to U.U....Like many people I abandoned religion in my teens. It seemed stupid and useless. Also like many people my life went off the rails thirty some years ago . My father had attended UU in Southold so I learned a bit about it. UU became part of getting my life together again. I especially love the chalice symbol... and the music...Blue Boat Home...

It really lifts you up.

What is something you like to do outside of U.U.... I am a voracious reader and actually enjoy exercise classes...

What is something about you that most people would not guess...There's nothing exotic to know ...anything anyone is curious about. Ask. I want to listen more and talk less these days.

Celebrating Rosh Hashanah



Lyra and Ezra help us celebrate Rosh Hashanah by practicing the tradition of throwing bread into water. This is a ritual of symbolically casting away mistakes and regrets of the past year while apples and honey symbolize the wishes for a sweet new year.

Unitarian Universalism and September

By Reverend Ben

Since it was popularized by Julius Caesar, January 1st has been globally recognized, across cultural boundaries, as the beginning of the new year. The goddess Janus, for whom January is named, famously has two faces, one looking forward, one backward.

But millions celebrate the Lunar New Year, which takes place between late January and mid-February. It's not only the most important holiday in China, it's celebrated with dragons and feasting in Viet Nam, South Korea, and other parts of Asia, as well, along with Chinatowns around the world. Persian New Year, Nowruz, starts in mid-March at the exact moment of the spring equinox. There's good reason for starting the year at that point... crocuses and daffodils return, blossoms appear on trees, new green emerges from the dormant, frozen earth, and birdsong fills the air. It's nature's yearly beginning. (We have the hymn, "Lo, the Earth Awakes Again.") But for the public schools, for Jews, and for Unitarian Universalists, the year really begins in September. Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, officially began at sunset, September 11th this year.

Many Unitarian Universalist congregations measure the start of their year at September as well. There was evidently an old New England expression... "The congregation of the open mind opens in September."

Many UU congregations around the land still offer a light program during the summer; some close altogether for the summer months. Happily, in my estimation, ours at the North Fork is a twelve month fellowship.

Yet I still like to consider September a fresh beginning, a "homecoming."

So as they say in Hebrew, L'Shana Tovah --- Happy New Year to you all, blessings on fresh fall beginnings!

NFUUF Speaker Series

with Maria Rodriquez



We were fortunate to have Maria Rodriquez as our guest as she spoke of *The Power of Trying Something New*. Maria is a first generation American, an educator working with children with autism and a community advocate. She shared with us her personal story of trauma and courage where she finally was able to see obstacles not as insurmountable challenges but as opportunities. She learned to speak up for herself, speak her mind, and find the courage to try something new.

We were all touched by her bravery, strength and heartwarming openness.

REFLECTIONS

“Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, (that God) must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blind-folded fear.”

So said Thomas Jefferson, the third President, when writing to his nephew. I believe that if there is a supreme sovereign of the universe, someone representing ultimate wisdom, someone who is attending to life on this miniscule, beautiful blue ball known as planet earth, that being would probably want us to think, to question, to doubt, and to learn. Clearly, by increasing our awareness of the world around and within us, we have been rewarded beyond imaginings.

Among the myriad blessings that have accrued from the use of our minds have been cures to smallpox, polio, and covid; the development of earthquake-resistant buildings; the ability to speak, email, or text on a moment's notice someone thousands of miles away; and the recent discovery of renewable energy. And because of written language, dating to the age of cuneiform, we also have a vast treasury of books and articles, keeping a record of accomplishments and discoveries, as well writings of all varieties that inform and inspire us.

Despite Adam and Eve being punished for eating from the tree of knowledge, despite Prometheus being penalized for giving fire to human beings – a symbol of technological and scientific advance – we are quite clearly the better for our quests for truth. Any God worthy of the name, I believe, would recognize that, and would applaud our achievements.

Second, I feel that the word “God” can appropriately be spelled with two “o’s.” To act in a Godly manner is to offer compassion to a neighbor, especially a neighbor in need. I agree with Matthew 25, calling for us to provide food for the hungry, clothing for those who lack it, visits to those who are ill.

In a similar vein, Muhammad was asked by a woman whose mother had just died, what she should do to memorialize her. Build a well, Muhammad answered, so that others who otherwise might lack water will now have access to it. On these matters, I represent one person – myself.

In our Unitarian Universalist faith, we do not dictate what someone is to believe or not believe about the subject of God. As one of the first Unitarian ministers in history, Francis David, in the mid 1500s put it, we do not need to think alike to love alike. What is important, when confronting ultimate mysteries that we all face, is to be free to believe as one's judgment and conscience dictate, and to be able to express one's beliefs in a caring community, without fear of reprisal.

I am so grateful for a Fellowship such as ours, where that is possible.

Happy September!

Blessings, Ben

Book Corner

RECOMMENDED BY BETSY KAPLAN

Devotions by Mary Oliver. This poet is sometimes referred to as St. Mary within the U.U. world because her beautiful writings so often reflect our values. She writes of the natural world, the passage of time, happiness and loss. Well worth keeping by your bedside!

The Searcher by Tana French. This is the first in a trilogy series featuring Cal Hooper, a retired Chicago policeman who moves to a quiet village in Ireland. Wonderful characters, real sense of place, and always a mystery to solve. Themes of “found family,” rural justice, and morality make this a rich and satisfying read.

A SMATTERING OF FILMS

This is a new column, suggested by Andrea Starr who contributed and created our first recommendations. Thank you, Andrea, and we are open to ongoing suggestions from the membership.

(Current) Christopher Nolan's "The Odyssey" is a sweeping, R-rated cinematic epic starring Matt Damon as a war-weary Odysseus. Blending a non-linear narrative, existential angst, and practical effects over three grand hours. It trades traditional divine intervention for a gritty, psychological study of guilt, memory, and the ravages of war. It provides grand visuals, strong performances, and thematic depth.

(Current-Family Fun) The Sheep Detective

A PG-rated comedy mystery featuring a star-studded voice and on-camera cast including Hugh Jackson, Emma Thompson, and Julia Louis-Dreyfus. The Sheep Detective takes place in a small English town and follows a quirky flock of sheep who try to solve the murder of their beloved shepherd. It balances goofy physical comedy with surprisingly mature and touching themes about grief and memory.

(A Classic Gem) Brief Encounter

Directed by David Lean and based on a play by Noel Coward, "Brief Encounter" (1945) is a timeless masterpiece about a married housewife and a doctor who fall deeply in love. Bound by duty and strict British morality, they must suppress their intense feelings and part forever. Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard give heartbreaking, understated performances that feel raw and completely honest.

CARING CORNER

We continue to collect items to be delivered to the Food Pantry, as well as clothing, medical and personal hygiene items that we deliver to the Ukrainian Church. Many thanks to Elizabeth and Desiree who do the heavy lifting! Desiree is also collecting food, towels and toys for cats and dogs at the North Fork Animal Welfare League. She welcomes any donations.

If you wish to reach out to someone with support, concern or celebration, email:

Desiree Passantino at desiree.passantino@gmail.com



Our shared covenant is expressed through a set of inseparable and deeply interdependent shared values.

as seen on uua website

NFUUF is an open-minded, open-hearted spiritual community. We are ever grateful for the guidance of our Reverend Ben Bortin. We meet on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month at 10:30 a.m. Jamesport Meeting House, 1590 Main Road, Jamesport, NY www.nfuuf.org

Editor Betsy Kaplan