

# CONNECTIONS

A COASTAL VIRGINIA UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS QUARTERLY

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## Worship matters

With September comes the formal beginning of the church and worship year. Normally, in the past, monthly worship themes were identified through a group process. That would have been difficult to do this year with the restrictions imposed upon us by COVID-19. But that does not mean that we will not have monthly themes, we are just identifying them a little differently. The Children's Religious Education Committee (CREC) decided that CVUU would utilize something called Soul Matters Sharing Circle to augment CVUU's already fantastic Religious Education program. There are approximately 145 congregations that are part of Soul Matters, a subscription service which provides resources for worship and music, religious education and small group ministry. As one of the subscribing congregations, each-



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## Finding Black Joy amidst the pain

By Rayven Holmes

A few months back, or an eternity in 2020 time, I wrote a piece for the weekly CVUU Courier. It was a leap of faith and I was terrified. Speaking one's truth does not always land on hearts the way we would hope, especially when that truth involves holding up a mirror for the white gaze to look at itself. After decades of navigating the world as a Black woman and weeks of never-ending email threads debating the ins and outs of supporting those of us impacted by systemic racism, as if we have the luxury of waiting, as yet another video rolled through my newsfeed I had to say something ... anything.

Black bodies limp on the hot summer pavement. My Black body, my brother's, my sisters', my parents', my grandparents', those who endured Jim Crow in the South and Sundown Towns in the North, and my great grandparents'—the first free people in our family. A bloodline of pain woven



through time and spilling out on the ground. The fabric of America reminding me that the next death shroud could be my own. That makes the pain personal each time another hashtag scrolls across my screen.

Pain seeks to be heard. It cries out in a fire engulfing all that stands in its way. It does not stop until it is healed.

The pain of those who have had their lives snuffed out is our pain. It radiates through the screen leaving fractals of generational trauma on the hearts and minds of every Black and brown person attempting to exist, to survive, to thrive under the weight of oppression.

Thrive. That is what we all seek. To know a life that is not only survival but a testament to all that we and our ancestors have always been capable of. To thrive there must be joy. An unyielding joy that fills our lungs as we scream out for justice.

I was asked if I would like to revisit my last piece. I do not. While I believe sharing our stories is important and vital for instilling empathy, I don't

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month we will receive a packet of materials centered around a theme. You can read more about what will be happening with our religious education programing in this issue of Connections, but we will also be using the same theme each month in worship, and perhaps some of the same materials. Here are each of the monthly themes:

September	Renewal
October	Deep Listening
November	Healing
December	Stillness
January	Imagination
February	Beloved Community
March	Commitment
April	Becoming
May	Story
June	Play

Sharing theme topics and resources will enable us to more holistically integrate worship and religious education, and it will help to create more opportunities for cooperation and collaboration.

**Rev. Viola Abbitt**  
**Pronouns: she/her/hers**  
**518-290-0820**  
[minister@c-vuu.org](mailto:minister@c-vuu.org)

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believe Black trauma should be the only thing that elicits the urgency to fight racism that our world requires. Black joy should have this power too.

So, instead of sharing stories of Black trauma to be lapped up for a majority white readership in the hopes of eliciting a tinge of empathy and understanding I am going to share a story of joy.

Once upon a time I was summoned to a family gathering in the far away land of Ohio. I don't recall why we were gathering. I do remember that getting out of it was not an option unless I wanted years of well-crafted family guilt to rain down on me. So, I packed the children into the car and embarked on the eight-and-a-half-hour drive, alone, with three kids. That part, I have blocked out of my mind for my own sanity but we arrived intact. As with any excursion to visit family you have that one day that's jam packed with stuff. It's like for one day all the elders in your family become Time Lords and can bend all of space and time for their own desires.

Our jam-packed day involved the whole family going to a giant indoor entertainment complex. Take the energy of Christmas morning, sprinkle in an obscene number of machines with lights and noise, and throw in one younger brother who has disposable income and conveniently doesn't hear you when you insist that your kids, and your already full hands, don't need whatever ran

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dom thing they are asking for. Inside this entertainment complex there was a laser tag game. Which, naturally, all the children wanted to play. Because I have three kids and pursued education when I started college, my family seems to think I'm some sort of baby whisperer. Anytime there is an activity, guess who gets stuck with all the children? Yup, it's me. We were playing laser tag though and I was ready to take some sweet vengeance for all the hours of mind-numbing Nickelodeon I had been subjected to that week.

I did not get my vengeance that day.

Instead, I did my best to out maneuver children who formed the ultimate alliance, while simultaneously keeping a 5 year old safe from themselves as they racked up points via the targets conveniently placed on the human who was making sure they didn't get lost.

I don't remember the scores, but I do remember the laughter. It filled the space cutting through years of trauma and pain. In that moment there was no fear, only fun. We were safe from a world that would see our laser tag equipment as justification for ending our lives. In that space, in those dark corners, our laughter echoed out for all to hear. Black joy danced out from behind the laser tag room doors and mingled with the buzzes and dings, it was our prize to win and we won.

As we go forward there will be more pain, this is inevitable. But there can and should be Black joy too. Let it ring out loud for all to hear and capture a bit of it for yourself to remind you that even when all seems lost there is always light. Sometimes we must find that light inside ourselves.

Want to support and encourage Black joy?

End white supremacy.

Fiercely love Black people, not just Black culture.

**Rayven Holmes is our Youth Program Coordinator at CVUU. She lives in Hampton, VA with her husband and 3 sons.**

# Pandemic Prayers: *Finding a way to devotion as a UU*

By Rosemary Reilly Ayres

For most of my adult life, I have not been one who prayed very frequently or regularly, with the possible exceptions of when my father suffered his sixth and final heart attack in 2001. He fought a good fight for eight long days before losing his battle with heart disease. And then again in 2008 when my mother suffered a stroke while at Bingo (I don't think there was a more apt place for my Mom to have her final moments on Earth. For my mother, Bingo was equal parts fun, worship, and therapy, with a bit of cursing at the caller thrown in (I think that was the therapy part). After her stroke, she remained in a coma-like state for three torturous weeks.

During those eight days with my father and those three weeks with my mother, I prayed a lot.

When I began attending church (then UCN, now CVUU) and practicing yoga and meditation around 2004, I began to pray a bit more regularly. However, I have never prayed more often or more regularly than I have in these last five months (a pandemic is a tough time to be an atheist or an agnostic, y'all). I have gone from praying a few times a week to praying every day, most nights, and additionally throughout the day, as needed (much like I take my anxiety meds-PRN).

My prayers may sound quite different than a lot of other people's prayers and that's OK. When I pray, I do not have much guidance or structure from which to draw. I do not follow the faith of my parents, Catholicism, but instead I follow that of my chosen faith, Unitarian Universalism. UUs are not particularly known for praying, but we do allow each person to search for their own truth and meaning and practice it as they see



It. Unitarian Universalism is a faith of many faiths—we are the melting pot of religions. Some UUs are Christian; some are atheist. Some are Jewish; some are pagan. Many of us are Recovering Somethings. Thus, UUs may or may not pray.

There is one structure that inspires my current prayers, however, and the pews of the Unitarian Church of Norfolk, a previous minister, and an irreverent author are its source. I was sitting in church one Sunday when I first heard the wise and funny words of one of my now-favorite authors. Our minister at the time, Danny Reed, read aloud during his sermon from one of Anne Lamott's works. Her words made me think; they made me feel; they made me laugh. All of the components that Danny once told me made up a good sermon.

I was so taken with this new-to-me author, I stopped at my local library on the way home, checking out and devouring many of Anne Lamott's books. I fell in love with her "I-don't-care-what-you-think-of-me (#LifeGoals), in-your-face-liberal, Jesus-loving, recovered-alcoholic" infused writing that borders on preaching.

Hell, it probably does not even border.

I revere all of Lamott's memoirs and essays, but "Help, Thanks, Wow. The Three Essential Prayers" is the book that inspires how I pray now. Being the rebel that I am (I am Irish, after all), I say these three prayers each day, but I do not say them in Lamott's order.

I do not begin my prayers with, "Help." Instead, I always, always, begin my prayers with, "Thanks." To me, beginning with gratitude and then asking for what I want just seems like good manners.

Some days I give thanks for the big and for the miraculous: for life; for my incredibly blessed life thus far; for the gift of life that is the day in front of me. Other days, I give thanks for the small, but wondrous: for sleeping through the night without waking with an anxiety attack at four am; for precious and rare time spent with one of my grown daughters; for a peaceful walk filled with the beauty of nature: birds and bunnies, sunrises or sunsets.

Most days, I give thanks for both the big and miraculous and the small, but wondrous: for isn't all life miraculous and wondrous?

After I have expressed my gratitude to whomever is listening (I am pretty sure that no one but me is listening, but I keep an open mind on these matters. I am more agnostic than atheist), I begin my "Help" prayers. I do not hold the beliefs that my Christian family and friends do. I do not believe in one supreme, omnipotent and patriarchal god with a capital G. I do not believe any one being is listening to my prayers and answering how He sees fit.

I do believe in the power of prayer, though. Even if that power lies only

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in how it makes me feel. I see my prayers as wishes, intentions, meditations, and hopes; sometimes, dreams, even. They are hopes and wishes thrown out to the universe, much like requests from a DJ. But instead of being requests from some other being, I believe they are mostly requests both for and from myself.

Since March, my “Help” prayers have been quite lengthy. While there is always much to be grateful for, we are living through what, for many of us, is probably the most frightening and the most stressful time of our lives. So, as with my “thanks” prayers, I ask for help with both the big and the “small.”

My big prayers are for our world and for our nation to learn enough about this virus to contain it, to mitigate it, and to get us through it with as minimal a loss of life as possible. I also pray for our leaders: from a world and national level, to our state, local, and business levels. I pray for all of them to lead from both science and from empathy; to make decisions based on the best data they have; to listen to the scientists and to learn from other countries; to make the best decisions they can with our, their citizens’, lives as their first concern. I pray for peace—both for peace in the world and for peace in our nation. Then I ask for help to have peace in my own heart, for if I do not have peace in my own heart, how can I ask for help with peace in our country and in our world?

I pray for help with healing: for all those who need healing from the virus; for all those who need healing from our nation’s ugly racism, inequality and injustice. I pray for healing from the seeds of division that have been sown by our politicians and news outlets for decades. I pray that our current leader is no longer our president come November and that both he and our nation accept that peacefully.

Then, I ask for help for those I know and love: for those suffering from the virus in any way; for those on the front lines: be it in hospitals, homeless shelters, or in retail businesses. I ask for help for those who are grieving a loss, mourning during a time when it is even harder than normal to comfort and be comforted. I ask for help in keeping those who are protesting safe. More recently, my prayers include asking for help for our

teachers, who, depending on where they live and teach, may become our next front line workers.

I then ask for good health for my family, for my friends, and for my coworkers. I ask for help to do something worthy with the gift of the day: an opportunity to perform a small act of kindness, give a word of encouragement to someone who needs it; to make a small difference in a big world. Or, I may just ask to get

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## Join our Social Justice team!

Currently, CVUU’s social justice priorities are:

- Affordable housing and homelessness
- Affordable healthcare and healthcare access
- Environmental quality, climate change, sea level rise and community resiliency
- Equal rights and gender equality
- LGBTQ rights and ending discrimination
- Racial justice and fighting racism in our community

The Social Justice Committee’s role is to increase the congregation’s knowledge of these topics and to encourage participation in appropriate local organizations and activities. Members bring a Unitarian Universalist perspective in addressing these issues and amplifying our congregation’s voice in important regional affairs.

To get involved, contact co-chairs:  
Lynn Waltz or Sunny Phillips:  
[lynn@lynnwaltz.com](mailto:lynn@lynnwaltz.com)  
[riselikesunshine@gmail.com](mailto:riselikesunshine@gmail.com)



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# 'Stony the Road' dives deep into the roots of racism

By Tracy Brune

"*Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow*," by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., is a book I wish was being used in school classrooms. I think the history lessons for most Americans, both Baby Boomer and Generation X, did not present a true picture of the agonizing state of political and social injustice that persisted throughout most of the 20th century and whose effects remain with us today.

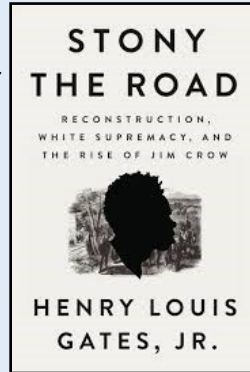
Outside of the pictures, preface and epilogue, the main text is only about 250 pages—in which Gates offers a tightly written, but complete history of the period of Reconstruction and Redemption—the years after the Civil War, when black emancipation was quickly followed by the backlash of white Southerners who unleashed terror in the former confederacy in an effort to re-subjugate black Americans.

For UUs, the book's title will spark recognition to a hymn often sung at our services, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," which according the NAACP, was originally penned as a poem by James Weldon Johnson. It was put to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson and was first performed in public in the Johnsons' hometown of Jacksonville, Florida as part of a celebration of Lincoln's

Birthday on February 12, 1900 by a choir of 500 school-children at the segregated Stanton School, where James Weldon Johnson was principal. The title comes

from the second verse of the song: *Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod, felt in the days when hope unborn had died ... yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet come to the place for which our fathers sighed? We have come over a way that with tears has been watered; we have come, treading our path thru the blood of the slaughtered, out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.*

I don't believe I ever truly heard these words fully until reading this book. What it has left me with is a feeling of jawdropping naivety. And, other than the glossed-over version provided in my high school American history class, I had never given much thought to the Reconstruction era in the US, let alone the horrors of the "Redemption" period. Reconstruction — the dozen or



so years after the Civil War when black emancipation was extended to voting, political office, employment and other citizens' rights — was quickly followed by the Redemption period, a white backlash that unleashed the oppressive Jim Crow regime, lynchings and further horrors on black Americans. Professor Gates book is a deep-diving analysis of those times, facilitated by a concentrated effort in newspapers, ads, jokes, sambo art and comics to propagate white supremacist tropes that continue to poison minds to this day. Reading the chapter on "scientific" arguments for racism and seeing the racist imagery, especially the postcards depicting actual lynching victims and their smiling killers, is stomach turning, but necessary. Gates included them to show the pernicious nature of white supremacy.

If you are left wanting to know more, check out the outstanding 4-hour PBS documentary "Reconstruction: America After the Civil War," hosted by Gates: <https://www.pbs.org/weta/reconstruction/>

**Tracy Brune is the Communication Coordinator for CVUU and the organizer of the CVUU Novel Ideas Book Club, which meets monthly.**

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through the day without a panic attack. Some days, I ask for all of these things. I try not to be too greedy with my version of (g)God(s)/Goddess(es)/the Universe.

After my long list of help requests, I get to the shortest, but sweetest, part of my prayers: the "Wow!" part. Here is where I usually say, "Wow!" to some gift of nature I had the good fortune to witness: the pair of cormorants sitting on a branch extending over the lake

across the street from my house; the baby bunny who braved a quick run from the safety of the bushes to the lush greenery of the grass; the Great Blue Heron who stood as still as a statue as rain poured down around us; the vibrantly painted, yet peaceful sunset sky; a double rainbow in my backyard.

Saying these three prayers daily (or more) helps me feel more at peace with my self and more hopeful about life. If all my prayers give me are a greater sense of peace and a greater

sense of hope, I am more than okay with that. I don't know about you, but I could sure use as much peace and as much hope in my life as possible.

And so, in the scrambled order of Anne Lamott's words, I will continue saying these three essential prayers: Thanks. Help. Wow!

**Rosemary Reilly Ayres is a CVUU member, Covenant Circle co-facilitator, current Virginia Beach Public Library employee, former homeschooler and RE teacher, and sometime blogger.**

# 'The Beautiful Struggle' is a family story

By Sheila Dinwiddie

This summer I stood by the side of the road with fellow members of CVUU proclaiming that Black Lives Matter. As the cars came rushing by many saluted us with blaring horns of affirmation. When temperatures rose above 90 degrees, I was finally driven inside to pick back up my summer reading. I started with Ta Nehisi Coates, *"The Beautiful Struggle."* It is the story of his adolescent years in the warring streets of Baltimore where you needed the protection of your own crew of dan-

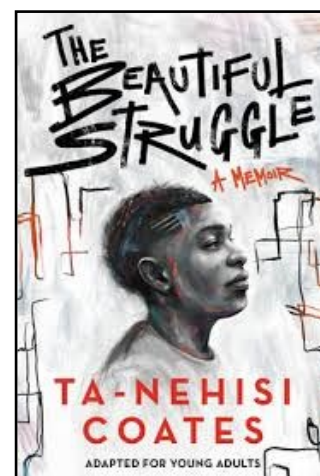


gerous boys just to walk to school safely.

It is a family story of a retired Black Panther father who made it his life's work to unearth forgotten black writers and manuscripts and re-publish them and a school teacher mother, who pushed and pulled him through lackluster student years, toward the day of his liberation into adulthood at the age of 18.

It is the story of his becoming Conscious of the machinery of white supremacy that threw roadblocks in his path towards fulfilling his promise and potential, from neglected schools to societal disrespect to police brutality. In his high school years, he fell in love with the African drum, the Djembe. He joined a group of drummers; the drum ignited the lessons his father had preached to him his whole life. He describes accompanying a dance

group recital "where the crowds lost their balance when the djembe hit. Sisters would dance in the aisles; mamas would leap on stage and move with power and grace." The beautiful struggle is a beautiful book, don't miss it.



*Dinwiddie has hosted a Writer's Group at her home for more than five years. The group works from the book, "Writing Down The Bones," by Natalie Goldberg.*

## Navigating care and choice at the end of life

By Judy Welp

Compassion and Choices is the nation's oldest, largest and most active nonprofit working to improve care, expand options and empower everyone to chart their end-of-life journey.

How we live the final chapter of our lives and how we die, are among the most deeply personal considerations of our lives. While it is our right to decide how much or how little treatment we want in our final days, our current healthcare system often ignores our wishes, or fails to give us the information we need to make fully informed decisions about our own care.

Compassion and Choices is leading the way in transforming our "one-size-fits-all" healthcare system, which allows so much needless pain and suffering, into one that puts people in charge of their own end-of-life



care. We envision a patient-driven system that honors an individual's values, religious views and spiritual beliefs. We are working toward an America that respects everyone's right to

make their own end-of-life decisions, in consultation with doctors and loved ones. We advocate for the full range of options to ensure everyone can die peacefully and with dignity.

Beginning with Oregon's Death with Dignity Act in 1994, Compassion and Choices has been instrumental in passage of every medical aid-in-dying law in the nation. These laws allow terminally ill adults to request medication to die peacefully if they choose.

Currently 9 states plus the District of Columbia have such Medical Aid in Dying (MAID) laws on their books. This past legislative session Virginia saw a MAID bill introduced for the first time. We anticipate the bill will be introduced again this year and we

 **compassion & choices**  
Care and Choice at the End of Life

are looking to build a network of people who support MAID in Virginia. We need people who would be interested in working on public education as well as lobbying their state legislators on the issue. If this is an issue that matters to you, please visit the Compassion and Choices Website (<https://www.compassionandchoices.org>) or for local action contact Judy Welp with the CVUU community. Compassion and Choices 757 Action Team will be working with our Social Justice Team in the upcoming year.

*Judy Welp is a longtime CVUU member who has served on many committees including the Building Council. This article is drawn from 'Compassion and Choices Our Mission Our Work.'*

# Q & A WITH THE STAFF OF CVUU



## Rev. Viola Abbitt—Minister

**How long have you been with CVUU?** Since 8/1/2020.

**What do you love best about your job?** I love everything. But, if you are really going to make me pick, I would have to say, the people.

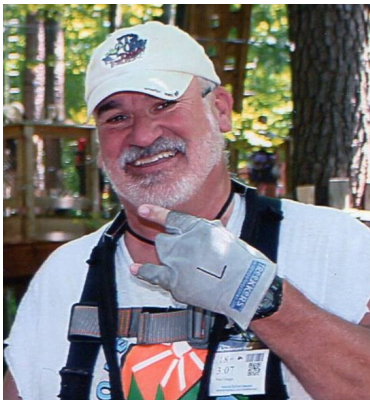
**What are your hobbies, interests?** I enjoy, the outdoors (especially the beach!), music, dancing, games and good food!

## Tracy Brune—Communications Coordinator

**How long have you been with CVUU?** It will be three years this Oct. 16th! I started about 8 months before our move from Norfolk to Virginia Beach. My office at UCN was a folding table in the old Curtis Room!

**What do you love best about your job?** I love working for such a wonderfully loving community and having really fun and supportive co-workers. I would say what I love best is getting to use my creativity in crafting some of the communication pieces for CVUU. We have a great, collaborative team here so inspiration is plentiful.

**What are your hobbies, interests?** I am an avid reader and the current organizer for CVUU's Novel Ideas Book Club, a left-handed knitter, and an animal lover. I love hiking at Fort Story along the beach and I also foster kittens for a local animal shelter. To date I have fostered well over 100 kittens since 2008.



## Paul Greggs—Director of Religious Education

**How long have you been with CVUU?** I will have been with CVUU for four years this November. November 2016 I started as the Youth Program Coordinator. I fell in love with the church and joined shortly after I started. I really feel the love at CVUU.

**What do you love best about your job?** I love The Children! I love working with kids. I have been working with kids ever since I was a kid (teen). That's a long time and have enjoyed every minute of it.

**What are your hobbies, interests?** I love the outdoors (kayaking, canoeing, fishing, hiking, rock climbing and repelling, mountain biking and disc golf). I love taking others out on trips. At one point I owned 49 canoes and kayaks. Now I am down to 17. I plan to down-size a little more due to my hip issues. I am into puppetry. I have been a ventriloquist since age 10 and want to start a puppetry troop to include folks of all ages at CVUU.

## Matt Griset—Music Director

**How long have you been with CVUU?** I started working for the Unitarian Church of Norfolk back in August of 2015, fresh out of college. I was new to Unitarian Universalism and excited to learn it's traditions. Luckily, I had a wonderful congregation and a devoted choir to help me see the love of community and UU values.

**What do you love best about your job?** One of the things I love most about my job is everyone's unbridled passion for music. Whether being a multi-ensemble volunteer or an avid listener from the sanctuary's seats, our community has a deep understanding of how pivotal and diverse music can be. Because of this, I am able to explore more possibilities for what worship can mean. What helps each of us feel spiritually fulfilled is going to be different from person to person, so it is a blessing that our community can embrace that principle for one another by honoring multiple forms of worship.

**What are your hobbies, interests?** When I am not pursuing music through directing, teaching, performing, and songwriting, I find great joy in drawing, blues and swing dancing, hiking, reading, visiting breweries, skateboarding, and gardening. I am looking forward to another wonderful year with CVUU's amazing community.



# Q & A WITH THE STAFF OF CVUU

## Susie Gullixson—Congregational Administrator



**How long have you been with CVUU?** 6 years, May 1, 2014.

**What do you love best about your job?** The staff, our congregation and knowing all the positivity we are spreading around us. It is always interesting and fast paced!

**What are your hobbies, interests?** I love gardening, cooking, laughing and my cat. I crochet, love puzzles, and many artistic mediums.

**About me:** I am agnostic and lean more towards paganism. My heritage is Norseman, Germanic, and Celtic. I was raised in a commune in University Park, MD third grade through high school. My church as a child was Paint Branch Unitarian Church in Adelphi, MD. My first language was Spanish, my family lived in the Dominican Republic for my first formable years of childhood with my father's life long career with the US Navy.

**Secret passion:** I wish I could be an amazing seamstress and make all my clothes.

## Rayven Holmes—Youth Program Coordinator

**How long have you been with CVUU?** Hello CVUU! In the Courier a while back I told you all a bit about some of my cherished family members, but I have yet to tell you all a bit about myself. First, I've been a member of CVUU for about a year and a half and I've had the joy of being YPC for almost a year. Before becoming an official member, I attended a Christmas Eve service and Kwanzaa event at UCN. In fact, if you check out the Pilot Online article from 2016 you will see the minions and I in the front row. They were much shorter then than they are now.

**What do you love best about your job?** I've been an active participant in UU Religious Education for ten years, first at home with my own children using materials from the UUA and CLF (Church of the Larger Fellowship) then as a member of UUFP (Newport News, VA), and now at CVUU. I love working with kids. Their curiosity and blatant honesty are often a balm for the soul in a world crafted by adults who can't seem to get out of their own ways. It isn't easy work, but it is truly great work and I feel privileged to have the opportunity to take part in it.

**What are your hobbies, interests?** When I'm not corralling my own small army I enjoy reading, I'm currently finishing "There, There," by Tommy Orange and have recently started "Children of Blood and Bone," by Tomi Adeyemi, as well as knitting, writing, a healthy dose of Candy Crush, and staying up way past my bedtime binge watching shows while talking to close friends. When I'm not knee deep into a book, or a Netflix show, you can find me in my garden or camping with my family. This past year as YPC has been a pleasure and I look forward to us all gathering in person again.



## Wednesday Night Vespers

*Join us at 7 p.m. live on  
Facebook @COVAUU*



Coastal Virginia  
Unitarian Universalists

## A Prayer for White People

By Ellen Quaadgras

Sheltered in our homes,  
Or going to work, at risk,  
For week after week after week,  
We're edgy, tired, a little raw.  
We are tender, vulnerable,  
Open.  
A little more open than usual.  
Those of us who are white,  
Who, before, might have been  
distracted  
Who, before, might have been  
too busy  
Who, before, might have been  
preoccupied with our lives,  
Are noticing the ways injustice  
has happened to people of color,  
the same way, again and again  
and again,  
Now, we have become aware.  
Please, may we be aware.  
May we not lose awareness.  
May we not get distracted.  
May we not turn away.  
May we open—really open:  
Accepting the invitation to  
change—  
really change,  
our minds,  
our hearts,  
our world.  
When we encounter calls to de-  
fund the police  
When we encounter calls for rep-  
arations  
When we hear “follow our lead”  
from people of color  
May we listen, may we learn, may  
we be open...  
Even if it means rethinking every-  
thing  
you thought you knew about the  
world.  
We have, all of us, as humans  
An enormous opportunity  
To change one of the oldest injus-  
tices  
In history,  
To change everything.  
May we stay vulnerable  
May we stay tender.  
May we take action.  
Eyes and hearts and minds,  
Open.

Reprinted from the UUA Worship Web.

## Q & A WITH THE STAFF

### Samantha Phillips—Housekeeping

**How long have you been with CVUU?** I started in January of this year.

**What do you love best about your job?** I love the people that I get to meet while working here. The staff and the congregation have been very welcoming since I began working here. I could not ask for a more friendly group of people to be around.

**What are your hobbies, interests?** I enjoy reading. The last book I finished was “Brave New World,” and I am currently reading “Lord of the Flies.” I recently started learning how to play the banjo. I love learning a new skill but my poor fingers wish the calluses would build up quicker. I also enjoy playing video games, crocheting, and spending time with my cat Whiskey.

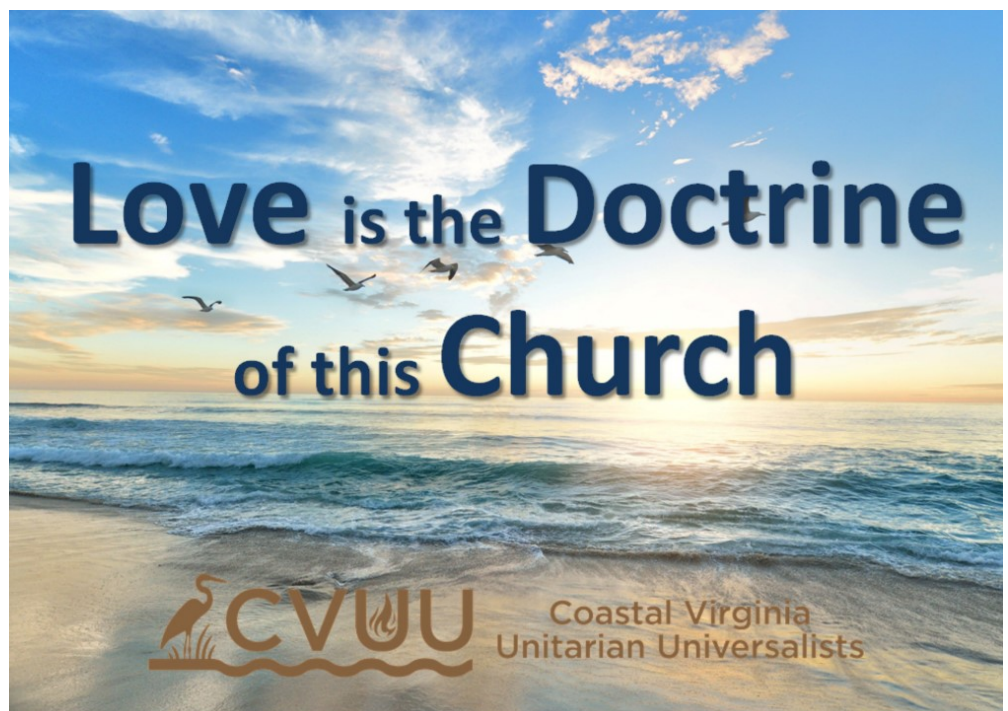


### Selene Spelts—Childcare

**How long have you been with CVUU?** I'll have been at CVUU seven years in December.

**What do you love best about your job?** I love watching the kids grow up and change. There's lots of kids I've known their whole lives and it's fun seeing them mature into these amazing people. My whole life revolves around children, mine and others.

**What are your hobbies, interests?** I enjoy home-schooling my three kids and helping out the home-school community. My happy places are nature preserves and the local zoo.



# JuneteenthVA finds a home in Portsmouth

By David Schleck

What was once a segregated movie theater in Portsmouth is transforming into a community center that will use performing arts and conversation to heal the wounds of slavery without shame or blame.

Leading the charge is CVUU member Sheri Bailey, a playwright who founded JuneteenthVA 23 years ago. The organization recently acquired the Colony Theatre, located on High Street across from the Commodore Theatre.

Sheri remembers watching movies at Colony Theatre not long after it was integrated in the 1960s. JuneteenthVA is leasing the building with the ultimate goal to purchase it.

"This theater will be for the community to come in and share their stories," Sheri said. Portsmouth Theatre Academy will train folks to be historical reenactors like those in Colonial Williamsburg but who will also be trained to perform on a Broadway stage."

The training will empower people to access their family history and understand that the settlement of Jamestown in 1607 leads directly to where we are today.

"The goal is to bring together people with differing perspectives to engage," Sheri said about JuneteenthVA. "That's the only way to deal with the roots and guts of slavery."

Juneteenth is the oldest national commemoration that focuses on the end of slavery in the US. On June 19, 1865, the Emancipation Proclamation was read to enslaved African-Americans in Texas – the last Confederate state to have the proclamation announced. The observance of June 19 as African-American Emancipation Day has spread across the United States and beyond.

After the death of George Floyd heightened attention to America's history of racial injustice, Gov. Ralph Northam closed state offices in observance of Juneteenth this year and rekindled efforts to make it a perma-



**Pictured are cast members of the play "Abolitionists' Museum," written by JuneteenthVA founder and CVUU member Sheri Bailey, who is on the far right. Also pictured are CVUU members Gwen Towe as Sojourner Truth and Harvey Ed Jones as John Brown.**

nent state holiday.

"At JuneteenthVA, we believe that public conversations are critical," said Sheri, whose plays have been performed in front of Portsmouth's Confederate monument and at schools across the region. "Every play ends with conversation which is where we have growth and healing." On September 26th, under the shade of Hampton University's Emancipation Oak at 10 a.m., Sheri will speak about her work.

In addition to Portsmouth Theatre Academy, JuneteenthVA will host theatrical performances and discussions, air programming on WJVA-LPFM radio and promote the establishment of Fort Monroe as a place dedicated to conversations about race and anti-racist policies. Additionally, Sheri is among the many voices calling for Fort Monroe to expand the Historic Triangle into a Historic Diamond that will tell the full story of America's founding.

Sheri has been leading these efforts from her bedroom, but looks forward

to when the theater will start programming and become an archival home of history that has long been overlooked.

"Our goal is to dig into the roots of this history and share it from an African-American perspective. For the past 150 years, the history of the Civil War has been told by the losers of that war."

The 120-year-old building, which had been vacant for seven years, needs lots of work, including a new HVAC system, plumbing repairs, electrical upgrades and a re-design of the performance space to allow for social distancing. Oh, and a lawyer would be helpful.

If you'd like to help, contact Sheri Bailey at 757.606.0569 or [juneteenthva19@gmail.com](mailto:juneteenthva19@gmail.com) and sign up for a shift August 28th-30th. For more information, visit [www.juneteenthva.org](http://www.juneteenthva.org).

*CVUU member David Schleck is a retired journalist, freelance writer, member of the Communications Team and a member of the Grounds Crew. He lives in Virginia Beach.*

# Grounds Crew goes native with plants and trees

By Barbara Gelzer

Our church building has a very long shoreline on 3 sides, and to prevent topsoil erosion and pollution of our tidal creek we have been working to restore this area to a natural state.

Our first plantings were native shrubs and grasses along the west side of the parking lot. We added a large wildflower bed behind the shed; we'll continue to add wildflowers around the parking lot. In late spring, we planted many shrubs all along the parking lot curbing.

And then the Elizabeth River Project awarded \$1000 to add native trees, so of course we doubled down and started planting them right away. Consulting a list provided by the city of Virginia Beach, we selected native trees to improve our grounds. Planting began this spring and will continue this fall. Here's a short tour of the new trees:

At the far end of the parking lot:

Titi tree (swamp cyrilla)

Swamp Bay (perseus palustris)

Buttonbush (at the bottom of the bank, water-loving showy shrub)

Back of the gathering area:

Serviceberry

Sourwood tree

American Holly

Red Buckeye

On either side of the bare bank by the pump house:

Possumhaw viburnum (viburnum nudum— a tall, handsome native shrub)

South end of church:

Native fringe trees (near CRE parking and shortcut)

Native fringe tree (tall one, visible from south windows)

All these trees are native to southeastern Virginia and even in the face of continuing climate change will thrive. Most produce blooms and berries, to support pollinators and wildlife. We'll enjoy their spring blooms, colorful berries, and many shades of fall color.

Here are links with more info:



Image credits—Google Earth/Doug Throp

*This bird's eye view of CVUU allows us to see the tidal water that surrounds us. CVUU sits along a finger of the Eastern branch of the Elizabeth River and is surrounded by natural beauty on 9 wooded acres, 4 of which are wetlands. Below, amelanchier (Red tree, serviceberry) is one of many native trees we've planted.*

Titi tree: <https://www.carolinanature.com/trees/cyra.html>

Swamp Bay: <https://mtcubacenter.org/plants/swamp-bay/>

Serviceberry: <https://bernheim.org/learn/trees-plants/bernheim-select-urban-trees/downy-serviceberry/>  
<https://www.backyardforager.com/amelanchier-serviceberry-juneberry/>

Sourwood: <https://www.uky.edu/hort/Sourwood>

Red Buckeye: <http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=281049>

Possumhaw viburnum: [https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id\\_plant=VINU](https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=VINU)

Fringe trees: <https://www.southernliving.com/garden/grumpy-gardener/fringe-tree-the-best-native-nobody-grows>

Fringe tree folklore: <https://georgiawildlife.com/out-my-backdoor-ever-heard-grancy-graybeard>

This fall we will continue planting until the current grant funds are used up. We are also beginning

an ambitious long-range plan to increase tree canopy over the entire property and the Elizabeth River Project has advised us that even larger grants will be available.

If you would like to help water, plant and care for wildflowers, shrubs and trees, join the Grounds Crew! We also need help determining sites and selecting additional trees. Contact Barbara Gelzer [bpgelzer@cox.net](mailto:bpgelzer@cox.net) or just call or text 757-284-1880.

*Barbara Perry Gelzer is an experienced horticulturist, Chair of CVUU Grounds Committee and a member of the Environmental Initiative sub-committee. She has worked in the wholesale nursery trade. She has also served as Landscape Coordinator at the Chesapeake Arboretum.*



# After COVID-19, solitude of nature brings solace

By David Schleck

I joined our congregation's Grounds Crew with low self-expectations. An apartment-dweller most of my adult life, I don't have much experience planting trees or running a hose. I started on a chilly day this past winter, before the COVID-19 outbreak. Barbara Gelzer gave me the perfect task – spreading mulch. Nice and easy. Since then, through spring and summer, I've developed warm relationships with church members and Mother Nature.

The work keeps me distracted from the anxiety and sadness of unemployment. I lost my job in May, when my employer laid off scores of people due to COVID-19 budget cut-backs.

Barbara has been patient with me, sharing gems of knowledge about root systems and leafy temperaments on the nine acres of church property. One day, Barbara stopped in her tracks to examine a hole in the ground. She deduced that an opossum must have been digging for grubs. I pictured the nocturnal critter foraging for a midnight snack. My perspective changed: What was once just a hole is now a valuable part of the ecosystem.

I'm slowly learning the difference between a chokeberry and a button bush, and how to water a tree without drowning it.

There are moments when I feel sorry for myself and my job situation, but then I get back to work – picking up fallen branches and watering plants. It feels good to give something back to the Earth and to my new church family. I started coming to CVUU last year after feeling disenfranchised from my former faith community. Out on the church grounds, I pause to look out over the marsh, thankful that I'm sweating it out in a beautiful



**David busy at work on the grounds at CVUU. To join the Grounds Crew, contact Barbara Gelzer [bpgeizer@cox.net](mailto:bpgeizer@cox.net) or just call or text 757-284-1880.**

place – often under the shade of trees that have been through more years and more troubles than me.

Because I live within walking distance of the church, I'm able to get out there early in the morning. As I'm finishing up, occasionally I'll see another volunteer and say hello. Sometimes these are the only face-to-face encounters I'll have with someone in a given week.

In the solitude of COVID-19, I'm learning to wait for answers. I occasionally come across things that I don't know how to do – simple tasks, like how to load sticks into a wheel barrow. I eventually figure out that it's best to put in the smaller sticks first; because if you start with the big stuff, there won't be room for the little things.

And then I get to thinking about how



that applies to life's uphill battles.

Sometimes it's just too hard to tackle the big stuff, so we keep our heads down and take baby steps. With a little faith and patience, we eventually look up – and realize we've reached the summit.

**David Schleck is a freelance writer, a member of CVUU's Communications Team and a member of the Grounds Crew. He lives in Virginia Beach.**

# March drives home message to vote

By Rob Lontok

During one of four funerals for George Floyd, the Rev. Al Sharpton mentioned during the eulogy that he planned on organizing another March on Washington. It would be held in late August. As it turned out, I was setting up my respite break and DC was where I was planning to go. Once it became available, I registered for the event.

I was very excited on the day of the march. It was 57 years after MLK's March on Washington. And it was 65 years, to the day, after Emmett Till was murdered. I was still excited from the protests the night before over by the White House. When I arrived at the reflection pool, I was greeted with the sight of a throng of people. I had heard reports that the Rev. Al Sharpton or people in his camp were downplaying attendance due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Well, these people decided that a little good trouble was necessary, even during a raging virus outbreak. Masks were everywhere to be seen. I do not recall not one adult without either having a mask or at least quickly putting one when asked about it. Even children younger than two had masks. Social distancing was not as closely observed. Many people arrived as part of a group. Those bubbles of people did try to stay away from other bubbles when they could among the open spaces on each side of the reflecting pool. It allowed for cheering and even yelling when prompted by a speaker here and there without worrying about droplets going everywhere.

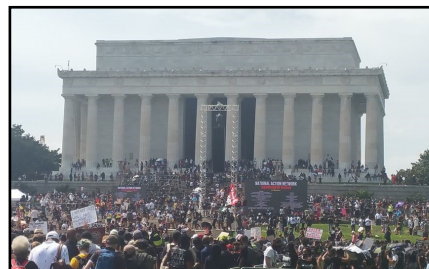
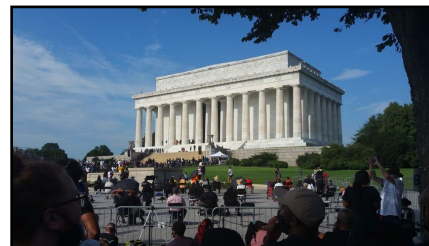
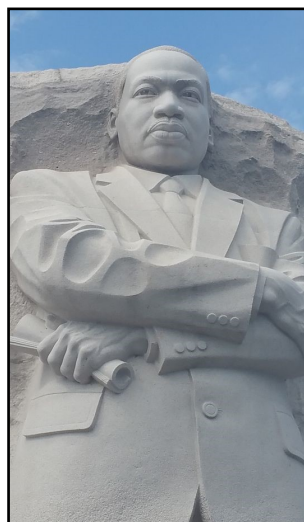
The speakers were varied and MANY! I mean a LOT! So much so that I could not tell you who some of those speakers were or what they meant to the movement. The few that I really remembered were Martin Luther King, the 3rd, his daughter and of course the Rev. Al Sharpton. MLK Jr's granddaughter was just fire!! She has every bit of her grandfather's speaking gift and energy. MLK III did a great job of tying today's march with the march that his father did. And the Rev? Oh, he had us extra motivated by the time he was done. "Get your knee off of our necks" was a common refrain.



After he spoke then several members of the various prominent shooting cases spoke. Mostly about their lost loved ones but also of the need for police reform and especially when it comes to treating people of color. After all the talking was done, we marched. This last part really wasn't organized well and it showed.

The goal was to have those family members LEAD the march. It ended up that they were stuck in the middle somewhere but protected and getting as much camera and media attention as you would expect to see. After reaching the MLK Memorial, the march ended and people disbursed to carry the fight back home.

My take away from the event was renewed purpose. One of the strongest messages from the day was that we will not see any meaningful change or progress unless we vote. We must vote out the virus in the white house in order to address the virus of racism. Voting will get two pieces of legislation passed. Voting will get police reform enacted. Voting



*Image credits/Rob Lontok*

**The event, organized by Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network, was attended by thousands on Friday, Aug. 28, 2020.**

ing is needed now more than ever. And voting is how our voice truly gets heard. Confirming your registration status, early voting and mail-in voting were highly encouraged over and over again. Staying safe while voting in person was also discussed. Completing the census count was mentioned a few times as well.

It was a great day. Many people came from many different places to be a part of history. I was glad that the universe arranged things that allowed me to be a part of that history too. It was great to be a part of the change instead of just preaching about it from my keyboard.

**Rob Lontok is a CVUU member. He and his wife Dee live in Virginia Beach.**

# BLM roadside protests at CVUU drew all ages



**Image credits/Jimmy Lutrell and Carmel Saucer**

As part of the local and national protests arising after the death of George Floyd in May, and the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor earlier in the year, CVUU members and friends held a multi-week sidewalk protest on Military Highway in front of the church.

A handful of people began the protest on June 9th, growing to 50 participants on some afternoons.

Holding a variety of signs supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, congregants ranging in age from 2 to 86 were very visible representatives of CVUU's commitment to racial justice.

Though the sidewalk protests have ended for now, there are many opportunities to work toward racial justice with other CVUU congregants.

Our Racial Justice Task Force meets by Zoom on the 4th Sunday of each month. Contact Amy at [hutch123457@gmail.com](mailto:hutch123457@gmail.com) for more information.

# TEN GOOD REASONS TO JOIN CVUU

1. Because here we join with open hearts and minds to worship together, seeking what is sacred among us.
2. Because here we are part of a long, liberal tradition of reason and tolerance, of hope and liberation.
3. Because here we honor our Jewish and Christian roots, and also reach out to know the great truths found in other religious expressions
4. Because here we acknowledge that revelation is never sealed and we empower ourselves to search for new truths.
5. Because here we nurture our children's enthusiasm and encourage their questions.
6. Because here we welcome diverse people and views.
7. Because here we join our strength with others to create a more just society.
8. Because here we respect the whole self—mind, body and spirit working together.
9. Because here we encourage each other to be true to ourselves.
10. Because here we build a supportive community that eases our loneliness and opens our hearts.



## Beloved Pets of CVUU



This is Molly Ayres. RIP. May 5th-August 15th, 2020. She was the beloved pooch of Rosemary Reilly Ayres. Her unconditional love, endless enthusiasm for life's simple pleasures and her hugs will be greatly missed. Top right is Stella Ayres, rescued in 2017, now about 5 years old. Like her dogmom, Lauren, Stella is an awesome hugger (especially when it's stormy out and she's a bit anxious!). Rosemary Ayres is the lucky Granddog Mom, bottom right.

# CVUU pledged to Love Liz

The Elizabeth was once known as one of the most polluted rivers on the Chesapeake Bay, but recently ecologists have seen the return of sea horses and river otters, due in no small part to the conservation efforts of the Elizabeth River Project.

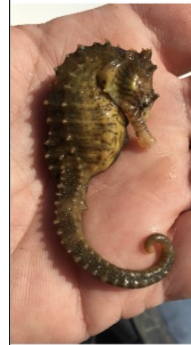
CVUU is just one of more than 5,000 businesses and homes to take the "River Star Home" pledge through the Elizabeth River Project, working to make the river a cleaner place.

Members who take the pledge agree to help the non-profit restore the Elizabeth River to the highest practical level of environmental quality by making good on 7 promises, including not feeding geese and "only rain in the storm drain."

In 2019, the program reduced sediment pollution into the river by 109,220 lbs, nitrogen by 78.3 lbs, and phosphorous by 24.4 lbs.! These meaningful results were achieved through homeowner best management projects like rain barrels and living shorelines, according to their website.

It's free & easy for everyone who lives in the Elizabeth River area! You'll receive a beautiful yard flag, welcome packet, and information on special events and opportunities when you make your pledge. Just go to: <https://elizabethriver.org/>

CVUU is committed to making our church home as environmentally friendly as possible. We are also members of the Pearl Faith Community, a similar pledge-program of the Lynnhaven River Now non-profit, whose goal is to help people of faith fulfill their responsibility for the stewardship and protection of waterways in Hampton Roads.

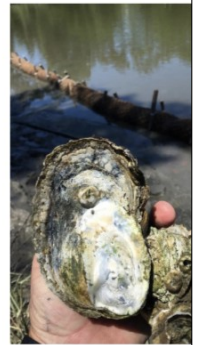


## Earn your FREE River Star Homes yard flag!

1. Scoop the Poop
2. Reduce Lawn Fertilizers
3. Only Rain Down the Storm Drain
4. No Grease in the Sink
5. Don't Feed the Geese
6. Avoid Single-Use Plastics
7. Don't Flush Medicines

Sign up at [riverstarhomes.org](http://riverstarhomes.org)

Funding Assistance for Rain Gardens & Shoreline Plantings  
Low-Cost Rain Barrels



Coastal Virginia  
Unitarian Universalists

## Weekly Courier

Staying connected with our CVUU members is important to us! If you would like to receive up-to-date weekly news from our congregation, easily accessible from a desktop, smartphone or tablet, subscribe to the Weekly Courier, published every Wednesday!

Click here to subscribe:  
<http://eepurl.com/dLqnOw>

