

# The USHer

*Your guide to the heart of the Unitarian Society of Hartford*



Guidelines for submissions are coming soon. Back issues are located [here](#)  
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## **A Leaf From The Pages of History**

Living in the Hartford area, you may be familiar with the story of the Charter Oak. In 1687 the King of England sent his representative here to rescind the Charter of the colony in Hartford. Locked in an endless meeting (UU's cannot imagine such a thing!), the colonists steadfastly refused to cede the charter. Suddenly all the candles in the meeting house blew out. In the confusion, someone spirited the Charter away, hiding it in a hollow of a very large oak tree, thereafter known as the Charter Oak. When the coast was clear, the document was retrieved and used to govern our state until 1818. Located in south Hartford and estimated to be well over 600 years old, the mighty oak blew over in 1856 in a violent storm. Many artifacts made from its wood are on display at the CT Historical Society. The original charter is framed with Charter Oak wood and is on display in the Capitol. Mark Twain quipped that if what he heard were true, a plank road could be laid of Charter Oak wood from here to Salt Lake City.

Did you know that right here in USH's church yard we have a descendent of the original Charter Oak? One of our members, Ed Richardson, was famous throughout the state as a tree expert and chronicler of CT's largest trees. Ed died at age 95 in 2019, having measured and documented more than 10,000 trees. A tree was planted in Ed's honor in Elizabeth Park, but you don't need to go further than our own yard to see an offspring of the famous Charter Oak. Through his connections, Ed had obtained acorns that were traceable to the famous oak.



He gave a few to the late Bill Westervelt who was on our Building & Grounds Committee. Bill planted and lovingly tended a sprout until it was viable. Located on the east side of our building between the sidewalk and the fence that marks the Village's property, it is thriving and nearly 25 feet tall. It seems fitting that we UUs, who cherish both democracy and freedom, should have a living example of those values among us. The Charter Oak represents democracy and liberty in Connecticut history, but *oak* also stands for strength, endurance and resilience. Oak is associated with wisdom, hospitality, freedom and fidelity – all moral qualities that we UUs value highly. Just as we UUs are encouraged to be our most authentic selves, an acorn cannot become anything but its true self. Myth has it that an acorn placed on our windowsill keeps us safe from storms, both virtual and metaphorical.

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## Fine Art Using Craft Media

We are a multi-talented, creative congregation and one of our artists is breaking ground by bridging the gap between craft and fine art. Diane Cadrain, a retired lawyer, uses fabric, paint and a sewing machine to render fine-art framed landscapes. The pieces shown here, each measuring approximately 24x30-inches, are part of a one-woman show at the Galatea Gallery of Fine Art in Boston called *The Ripple Effect: Images of Cape Cod*. The exhibit runs throughout December.





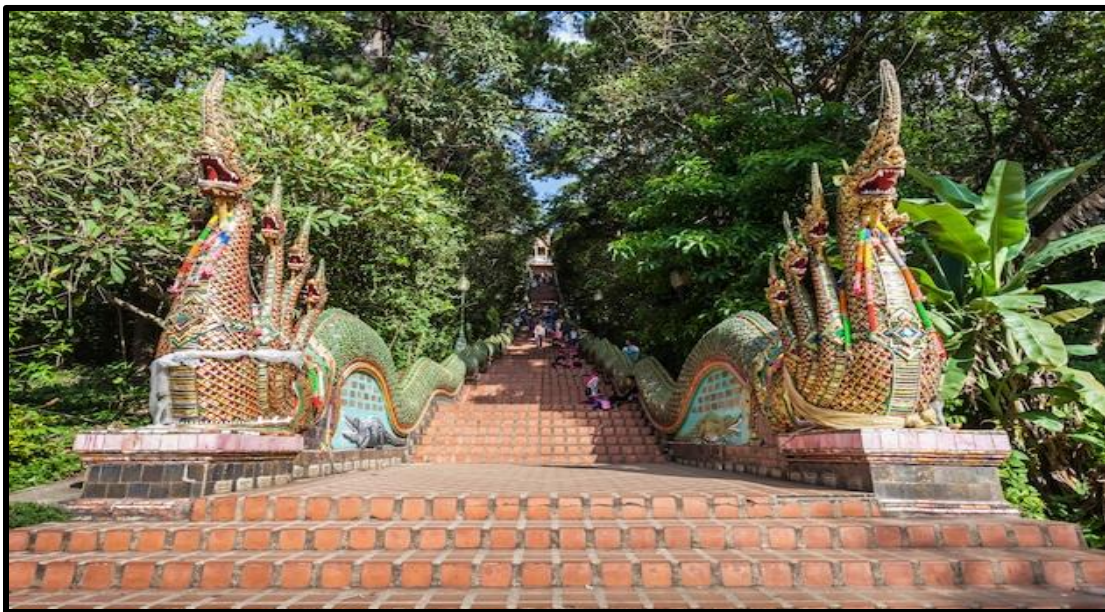
Diane and her family vacation on Cape Cod each September so the land-and-seascapes of the Cape have a special place in her designs.



She works from photos, transferring the designs to white fabric which she has treated with liquid polymer so that her paint will not bleed. The design is then painted on the fabric. Diane is partial to metallic paint which adds luminosity to her work. Once she is pleased with the painted design, she sews on a black border, then quilts it freehand using her sewing machine. The lines of machine quilting echo and enhance the theme of her works. In the works shown here, the quilting suggests wind, the action of the tide or the movement of water.

Diane and her husband Joe Rubin, who celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary last August, have belonged to USH for more than 40 years. Their three daughters grew up at USH. Joe, also a retired lawyer, now has a second career framing his wife's work.

Joe and Diane's daughter Leah taught for a year in Chiang Mai, Thailand and they visited her while she was there. One of Diane's fabric works is inspired by Thailand's Wat Prathat Doi Suthep Buddhist temple, shown in the photo here. The enameled dragons that guard the long stairway leading up to the temple are a prominent feature.

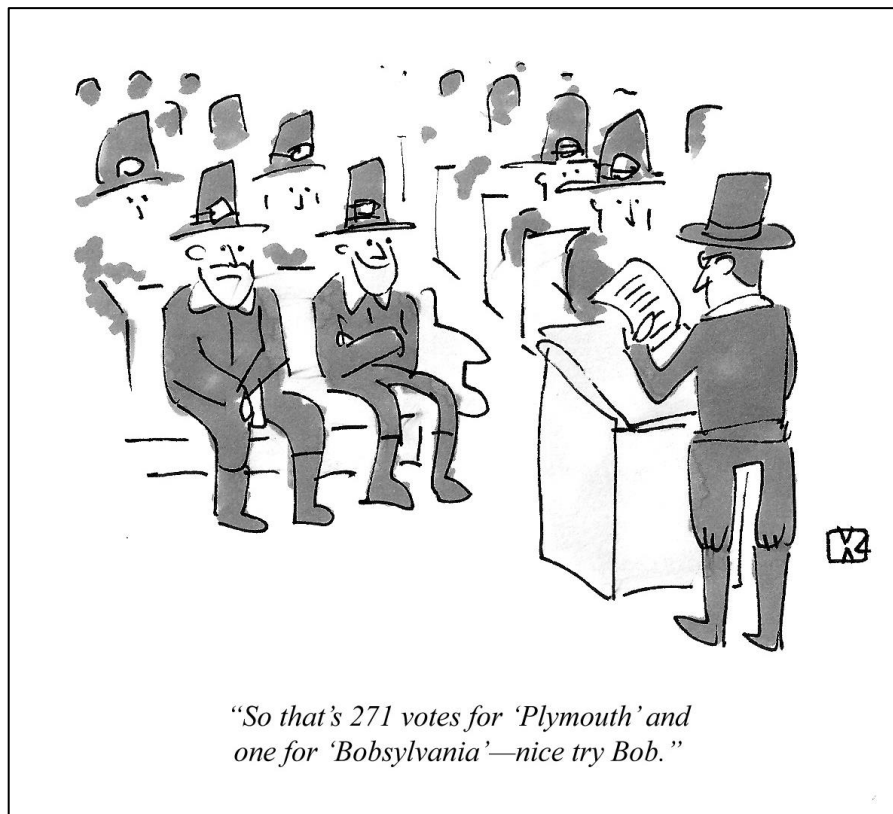




In Diane's rendering, the undulating dragon tails are suggested to the left and right of her work. This piece has been donated to USH and, appropriately, hangs in our yoga/meditation room.

In March, 2025, works from Diane's Boston gallery show will be mounted in the USH Ambulatory Gallery so we can all enjoy a closer look.

## Thanksgiving Brings An Abundance of Humor







### Eerie Fact

You can rearrange the letters in **Election Results** to read **Lies, Let's Recount.**

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## A Recipe For Love And Gratitude

Back in 2005 John Bengston was “church shopping” and our unique building aroused his curiosity. Looking for a church home for himself and his two young daughters, he decided to take a closer look at USH. John came from a Christian background where he found a lot of talk about social action but very little real *action*. When he joined USH, his girls, Melissa and Ariana, were in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades and USH proved a good fit for all of them. Soon he was recruited to chaperone a teen ski trip and he agreed on condition that he could bring Melissa. It was so much fun that John decided to get even more involved as a Youth Advisor, a post he held until 2014.

In the 2000s, there was a small Soup Sunday project led by Denise Ackieff. John became her assistant and when she moved in 2011, John took over the soup operation. He quickly expanded the production from 8 gallons to 20 gallons a month. He standardized the recipe and, after some trial and error, he committed to our long-time recipient: **Church Street Eats**, a cooperative ministry at Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford that serves hearty hot lunches to the hungry. As most of you know, USH gets first dibs on Soup Sunday after the service, and our purchase of soup and side dishes helps to support meals for folks who are homeless or food insecure. John maintains high standards for USH soup and Church Street Eats’ soup kitchen has high standards as well. Their well-run soup kitchen gratefully receives our delivery and takes proper care with refrigeration and serving so that not a drop of it is wasted.

John is a familiar face to the staff and consumers at Church Street Eats. He says the best compliment he’s ever gotten came from a homeless woman who stopped him while he was

carrying a bucket into the soup kitchen. Lifting the lid, peering inside and taking a big sniff, she said, “Yup...that’s the stuff! You gotta tell House of Bread how to make that!”

John sees this work as a ministry, a spiritual practice that feeds his soul while he feeds others. “I love kids, especially those here at USH; I enjoy cooking and have a soft spot for the homeless.” The soup-making operation brings it all together. “I have a strong desire to serve humanity – to give back. I’ve been lucky and it feels good to pass along some of my good fortune.”



As important as the soup is, perhaps even more important is that John is a strong role model for our older kids, wordlessly demonstrating how they can take their UU values into the world. Cooking together builds community. Around cutting boards and steaming pots, our kids have forged treasured friendships.

The USHer asked John about his daughters. Perhaps not surprisingly, both have gone into helping professions. Melissa, who lives in Easthampton, MA, is 32 now. She has a masters degree in special education and works on the tech side of a non-profit. Ariana, 27, has a masters degree in occupational psychology and lives in nearby New Britain. She works in Human Resources. These two young women started out as tweens in the kitchen at USH and, like their dad, are bringing some of what USH gave them out into the world, carrying on a ripple effect of goodness.

In case you’re in the mood for soup, John agreed to share his recipe.

### USH Chicken Soup Recipe



12 qts chicken stock, made ahead  
2 qts vegetable stock, made ahead  
20 lbs potatoes, peeled and chopped  
10 lbs carrots, peeled and chopped  
6 packages celery, chopped  
9 lbs onions, chopped  
5 lbs sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped  
4 heads of garlic, minced  
3 bags of 15-bean mix for soup, soaked overnight  
12 boxes Lipton onion soup mix  
4 boxes Lipton vegetable soup mix  
12 oz Bragg’s Liquid Aminos  
2 cabbages, chopped  
6 whole chickens, cooked and picked over  
To taste: thyme, rosemary, parsley, dill  
salt, pepper

Preparation: On the day before Soup Sunday, shop for ingredients. Deliver ingredients to USH and set up the kitchen for the young chefs with knives, cutting boards, large pots, etc. so there is no big rush on Sunday morning.

Do ahead at home: Soak beans. Cook chickens in the oven at 350 degrees for 90 minutes. Save carcasses. Using the carcasses, make 12 gallons of chicken stock. Make two quarts of vegetable stock.

On Sunday: Start kids peeling and chopping. Fill pots approximately 1/3 of the way with water. Add the stock, dividing evenly among the pots. Bring to a boil. Continuing to divide evenly, add the potatoes, carrots, celery, onion, sweet potatoes, garlic, the soup mixes and aminos. Reduce heat to simmer. Later, add the cabbage, chicken and the spices. Simmer another hour.

After serving to the USH congregation, pour soup into buckets and deliver to Church Street Eats, where they usually add noodles.

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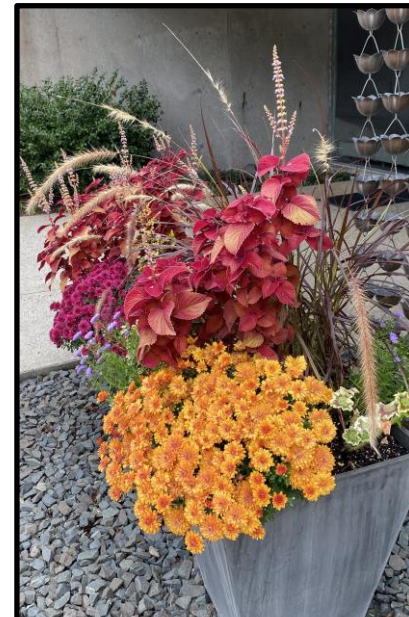
## A Time Such As This

By Rev. Bob Janis

Spirit of life and love,  
In a world that is constantly changing,  
In a life that gets so complicated, and sometimes,  
so hard, we resolve to turn again to gratitude.  
We are grateful for the turning of the seasons,  
and for autumn and winter  
Grateful for the harvest,  
the reminder that we are always growing,  
and we need both sustenance and enjoyment.

O spirit, O Life  
Help me to do the next thing.  
Help me bring a little more beauty to this world,  
and to this life I share.  
Help me to be kind to one person.  
Help me to make somebody else's life a little bit better  
Help me to tend the earth.

Help me to be gentle to myself.  
Help me to be a friend to myself,  
grant me strength for the journey to use what I have  
to help make this world more beautiful.  
O spirit of life, we see you in the beauty of the sunrise,  
we see you in the congregation, in the  
blessing of being with others, dedicated



to something larger than ourselves,  
that contains and represents all of us.  
Today's a good day to be here.  
And we're not alone.  
Together, let's make the most of it.  
Amen

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Sometimes when the sun is pouring in my  
window  
I'd like to think  
I have a responsibility to bask in it,  
to absorb the gift of light and warmth,  
to hold the pleasure on behalf of humanity –  
to think sitting in the sun pouring in my  
window  
is useful,  
sacred,  
sufficient.

From a poem by MaryeGail Harrison



**end**