

Stewardship Stories

Natalie Cordio



Hi. My name is Natalie and I'm 16 years old. I started my involvement with this church 14 years ago, when my parents moved to Andover and decided to become members. I grew up here. I came every Sunday and looked forward to Time for All Ages, singing in the children's choir, Religious Education (RE) classes, and feeling a part of this community. I always felt so welcomed and loved, like there would always be a place for me here.

This year I found a new way to be a part of this community. I joined staff and am now working as a nursery assistant. By being on staff, I gained a deeper appreciation for this loving community that I grew up with. I started to see all that went into it. Coming to church 30 minutes before it starts showed me just how much preparation went into services. I began to realize that this community didn't just appear every Sunday.

The coffee hour where I would come after church to enjoy goldfish and juice was there because people left service early to help set it up. The RE classes that I love were there because there were several meetings held trying to figure out ways to make it better and more enjoyable for people.

There are people working 7 days a week to provide this 2-hour escape on Sundays that we all love. I know each of us contributes to this church in our own way, and I'm thankful that we can all contribute to make sure that it's here for us every Sunday.

Carol Disney, Member since 1999



I was raised in the Episcopalian faith, but realized early on that I did not believe in some key aspects of things we were supposed to believe. When I asked my mother questions about this, she said that I "just had to have faith", which I found most unsatisfying. I resented having to kneel and pray that I was not worthy to gather up the crumbs under Jesus's table. I did, however, embrace other tenants of the faith, in particular the emphasis on peace and loving our neighbors. I was a UU in waiting.

After leaving home to attend college, I stopped attending church for 25 years. But when a dear friend changed careers and decided to become a minister, I was introduced to

Unitarian Universalism. Later my husband and I moved to New Mexico where we lived for ten years. I went to the local UU church a few times, but it didn't speak to me.

In 1998 our family moved to North Andover, and I decided to try church again. I was excited when I realized that the beautiful white church in the town center was a UU church. The year I first attended was during a transitional time. Wayne Shutee, an 81-year-old interim minister, served the congregation as the search committee looked for a minister following the retirement of David Blanchard. I became a member the following spring and was present when Lee gave her first sermon, and when the congregation voted unanimously to name her as our new minister. As of this point I was a regular churchgoer. I found North Parish to be an ideal combination of intellectual pursuit combined with love, humanism, and community. It made me think and encouraged me to act.

It took a little while however, to make connections and coffee hour could be awkward at first, although people were friendly. In my second year a member of the congregation approached me and asked me to join a Cakes group (a woman's spirituality group). I took the plunge! Being part of a Cakes group was an amazing opportunity to take a deep dive with others at North Parish, and these connections remain strong to this day, 24 years later.

And not to knock coffee hour, but I found the way to really get to know other people was through service, such as teaching RE, volunteering at the Red Bow Fair, leading summer services, and more. We have had some really fun social functions over the years. I particularly enjoyed the Senior Youth group Fancy Dinners, and there was a Comedy Night on a freezing Saturday that I will never forget. If you were there, please find me to reminisce about the unforgettable Minga. More recently, this past church year I have enjoyed being an usher, where I get to say hello to everyone who walks in the door.

So what does North Parish mean to me? It is a place where I have forged friendships with people of all ages. It is a place where I practice a different kind of faith, with an emphasis on loving others and serving the congregation and the larger community through social action. It is a place that has helped me awaken my own spirituality, which is centered on love, mindfulness, and nature. Lee's occasional musings about the Sabbath have made an impact, as I use her words to draw on earlier teachings and try to keep the day open for church, nature, and family.

By the way, my connection to nature is so strong that sometimes I skip church on a Sunday morning to birdwatch or simply take a walk in the woods. And that's okay.

Lynn Wentzel, Member since 1993



My UU Journey is really a family journey. My kindergarten aged daughter told me that all her friends attended Sunday school and she should too. A friend recommended North Parish – thought it would be a good fit. We walked in the door in September 1992, I signed her up for Sunday school, and we have been here since. My first volunteer gig was to answer a desperate request for Sunday school teachers in spring of my first year here. So began my North Parish journey. I joined the RE Committee the following

year and spent 1/3 of every church year teaching my daughter's, and later my son's classes. My kids are 7 years apart, so there was a LOT of teaching over a LOT of years. I discovered my favorite age group to work with were the senior high teens. Multiple years of Senior Youth Group, Coming of Age Mentor and Leader, and Youth Adult Committee followed.

As I mentored North Parish Teens, other adults were mentoring mine. Through adults that would take on Sunday teaching, OWL, Junior and Senior Youth Group and Coming of Age, my kids developed bonds with adult role models that kept them on track, allowed them to be their authentic selves and provided love and support through some really rough patches. They developed deep and lasting friendships with their peers in religious education that are still important parts of their lives today at 35 and 28 years old, many years after high school graduation.

For about 4 years, it was just the kids and me that went to church. In fact, one of my daughter's church friends thought that I was a single mom! My Husband played Sunday Morning Adult soccer in the fall and spring and stayed home in the winter. When our daughter started objecting to going to Sunday School, preferring to stay at home with Dad, he decided it was time to go to church too and get involved.

As a family, our financial commitment to North Parish increased as we became more involved in governance and in making financial decisions about the church. Both Keith and I have served on the Board of Trustees, I have chaired Parish Council twice, and he is deeply involved on the Finance Committee and Stewardship. We realized how reliant we are on member pledges to keep the staff paid and the lights on. We started increasing our pledges in line with the Fair Share Giving Guidelines that the Stewardship team has provided. We are lucky to have been a 2-career couple and have the means to do so, but we also prioritized North Parish in our charitable giving because of all that North Parish had given back to our family.

Currently, I serve as Parish Council Chair, a position I held over 10 years ago, am helping to plan and organize spring fundraisers to bring in additional funding, chair the Nominating Committee, teach in the Religious Education program and am a part of the Racial Justice Team. You will also see me often at the front door greeting, making coffee, and singing silly songs in fun costumes for stewardship month.

These Communities within our greater community allow me to stay connected with long time church friends, develop new relationships, especially with the youngest members of North Parish, and work towards a more just and fairer world. At whatever point you are on your North Parish journey, I hope you ALL support this community with a pledge in March and throughout the year with your time and talents.