

# Olean Unitarian Universalist community thriving

By Kate Day Sager  
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OLEAN — When Anna Bush was asked by a friend what religion she was, she decided to do something she had planned to do after retirement and organized a Unitarian Universalist congregation in Olean.

Two years later, the Olean Unitarian Universalist Community is doing well and growing. The group, which meets the first and third Sundays of each month, will gather again at 11 a.m. Sunday at the Yoga Betsy center at 109 S. Sixth St. All services are followed by a hospitality gathering.

"Currently, we have formed an Affiliation Committee that is working on getting us from being an emerging congregation to becoming a full congregation," Ms. Bush said. "We are interested in finding space, perhaps shared, that will accommodate our growing community."

"We went from having 10 to 15 come to services to having 15 to 25," Ms. Bush said. "We have a few ministers who have been doing services, and the rest of the programs are either lay-led or done by local speakers."

Ms. Bush said the congregation has developed its mission and vision statements during the past year. In addition, a friend of one of the congregants, who is a high school student, created the organization's logo, which can be found on its website.

"We are finding that there is a real need for a spiritual community that does not have a creed or dogma, although we



Photo submitted

**The Olean Unitarian Universalist community gathers during a recent Sunday at the Yoga Betsy center on Sixth Street.**

do have principles," Ms. Bush explained. "Our group is quite diverse, with folks who consider their religious roots to consist of everything from Christian to Jewish, Wicca, Pagan, Buddhist, atheist, agnostic and undefined."

Marcia Gallineaux, a member of the congregation, said one of the most appealing factors with the congregation is the diversity of the group.

"This is a community of diverse people with diverse backgrounds and interests who gather every couple of weeks," Ms. Gallineaux said. "The common thing (among us) is that we're different. The best of this is that they are sharing what they are and not trying to change you."

"For me, it's not spiritual as much as it is the welcoming community," she added.

According to information provided on the faith, as there is no official Unitarian Universalist creed; Unitarian Universalists are free to search for truth on many paths.

"We have a growing number of families and also many couples and singles," Ms. Bush said. "Our members have also been active in the United Faiths Community."

Ms. Bush said her interest in

Unitarian Universalism stems from her parents, who joined the religion when they moved to the Poconos 11 years ago. Ms. Bush said that while the Unitarian Universalism is predominantly a Christian faith, it more closely parallels the Jewish faith.

"In addition, it has become an all-embracing faith," she said.

Ms. Bush said an early lecture by the Rev. Tim Bancroft included information about the development of all religions throughout the ages.

Most attending expressed relief to have found what Rev. Bancroft described as a "beloved community" in the faith, Ms. Bush said.

For more information on the Olean Unitarian Universalist Community, contact the congregation's website at [www.oleanuu.org](http://www.oleanuu.org), send emails to [oleanuu@gmail.com](mailto:oleanuu@gmail.com) or call 701-4144. The group also has a Facebook page.

(Contact reporter Kate Day Sager at [kates\\_th@yahoo.com](mailto:kates_th@yahoo.com))



Anna Eskenazi Bush (left) and Richard Reilly at the opening of the United Faiths Community gathering in Olean.

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