



Ploughsha



A Piece of Mike's Mind

by Rev. Mike Morran

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Without apology or hesitation, I believe in church. No other organization has the same quality. No other community gathers around the kind of higher, noble values and commitments as the church. No other organization voluntarily invites me into a life of covenant and deep, accountable relationship with other seekers.

Theologically and pragmatically, it is an essential function of the church to create environments where these deep and accountable relationships can flourish. It is worth noting that when people are looking for a church, finding community is at the top of the list of what they are looking for, over and above

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Welcome to our New Religious Exploration Year

By Erin Kenworthy, Director of Religious Exploration

As we settle back into our routines at home, at school, and here at First Unitarian, let us take a moment to breathe in peace and exhale love. This year, RE is embarking on several new journeys during the first service that will both challenge and delight our children, youth and families. Our nursery staff is primed and ready to meet both new and returning families. Our Spirit Play classrooms have doubled, and we now offer this inclusive, Montessori-based experience to our Preschool and our Kindergarten/First grade classes. Our offering for Second through Fifth grades is an embodied, dynamic Spirit Jam experience that will bring in movement, science, music, art, nature, and creativity through a series of worshipful workshops based on our Whole Souul living theme each month. Our Sixth through Eighth grades will encounter a new Unitarian Universalist identity curriculum designed by to provide participants with self-awareness, self-compassion, and self-confidence tools for finding balance as

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theology, the gospel, or other considerations. Isn't that interesting!

Some of this falls on leadership, and the staff and I work hard to encourage and inspire fellowship, growth, friendship, even the confession, repentance, and forgiveness that can happen in beloved community.

People will attend and stay at a church where there have friends. But what role do the church members, not the leaders or the staff have in creating such an environment? I'll suggest five ways community members create community, and you'll notice these are pragmatic rather than programmatic. They are really about developing friendships.

1) Attend the Potlucks!

Yes, I know that in this day and age the potluck is often considered lame and outdated. Go anyway. You can't create community by just going to church Sunday, checking it off your list and going home. At some point you need to break bread with people, to experience life with people, to see where your church is going and hear first-hand what its people are wrestling with. There is a lot in Scripture about "breaking bread" together because something beautiful happens when people enjoy a meal together. So, go to the potluck and eat the mediocre lasagna. You'll thank me later.

2) Host other people at your home

If you want to experience community, you need to invest yourself in creating it. In all my years of ministry, the friendly people who go out of their way to make friends somehow manage to develop deep friendships. And the stand-offish people who don't lift a finger to create friendships most often complain about not being able to make friends. Relationships take work, they take time, they take effort, they take intentionality. There is a level of connection and spiritual growth that only happens in long conversations over food.

3) Help someone move, shop, or prepare for something.

It's amazing how much you can learn about a person as you are lifting a couch or chopping broccoli with them. Working with someone on a common goal goes a long way to developing life-long relationships. Maybe it's giving an elderly person a ride to the doctor. Maybe it's helping someone with basement remodeling job. Maybe it's shoveling snow for a widow.

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they face the stresses of being a teenager. Our Senior High youth will engage in youth led learning and worship experiences as they answer the question “Why are you you?” We are deeply grateful for the work and dedication of our classroom volunteers in each offering; we wouldn’t be able to provide any of these experiences without their willingness to share their time and talents with our children. We will offer nursery care during the second service. Also scheduled during the second service is our middle school Our Whole Lives class for Eighth and Ninth graders. In early 2017, we will offer our Fifth and Sixth grade OWL experience during the second service.

“This year, RE is embarking on several new journeys during the first service that will both challenge and delight our children, youth and families.”

It promises to be a full and fulfilling year! Please remember to register your participants online at www.fusden.org. Be on the lookout for Family activities throughout the year, starting with our annual attendance at the Standing on the Side of Love service on September 25th! If you have questions, would like to volunteer your own time, or want to share some information, please do not hesitate to contact me at erin@fusden.org. Blessings!

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Maybe it’s planning for a Capital Campaign! Either way, you develop deep, good, rich friendships as you are working and sweating and struggling alongside people and learning their unique sorrows and joys.

4) Get involved in a ministry

Whoever you are, you begin to make the church community your own by rolling up your sleeves and getting involved. Find an area where you can apply your gifts and talents. You will almost certainly end up working alongside someone you don’t already know. Many who work in our children’s program, social justice work, or serving the homeless have said the same thing – they’ve had the chance to get to know and make friendships as they’ve worked alongside others to serve something larger than themselves.

5) Know and pray over the needs of others

Do you pray for the people of your church? Send them good wishes? Try spending a little of your soul energy imagining what beloved community might look like, or feel like, or taste like, and you will have already had a small hand in making it happen. Have you listened to someone deeply enough to know what you might wish for them? Chances are high that the person who sits next to you at church this coming Sunday will respond with honesty and warmth if you and just lean over and ask, “How is it with your soul today?”

Flowing with Gratitude

by Lia Davis, Music Director

Ingathering Sunday marks the beginning of my 10th year at First Unitarian. As I reflect on the past nine years, I am filled with gratitude. I am grateful to have found my spiritual home (on accident! Nine years ago, I was looking for a church music position and saw the job posting at First Unitarian. I knew nothing about Unitarian Universalism. After a short time at FUSD, I couldn't imagine myself working for any other church). I am grateful to be doing work I love -- work that is creative, intellectual, social, and also deeply spiritual. I am grateful to be a part of our vibrant community and I am proud of all we do and stand for.

Looking forward to the coming year, I am grateful and excited to be collaborating with Brian Stone, our new Choir Director. Brian brings expansive choral expertise, warmth and energy. Our choir, the Chalice Singers, are already having so much fun singing and learning together.

I am also grateful for recent opportunities to connect with the larger UU community beyond FUSD. At the end of August, I spent a weekend with over 160 Unitarian Universalist singers from eight Front Range UU churches, including Brian and about half of our choir. We attended a Choir Retreat & Workshop at Sunrise Ranch in Loveland, CO, led by clinician Ysaye Barnwell (a member of the a capella singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock for several decades). Deeply musical, extremely knowledgeable, and at times downright feisty, Dr. Barnwell led our large group in singing Spirituals, Quodlibets (several Spiritual tunes sung together in counterpoint), gospel tunes, and African songs, all in the oral tradition (without sheet music). Our time together was incredibly rich and illuminating. Many times throughout the weekend, we were invited to listen for the melodies that arose from joining several melodies or rhythms together. I was reminded of the power of vocal communities, the power of singing together, and the ways that singing together can help us to listen more deeply to one another and ourselves.

I am grateful for our own powerful vocal communities at First Unitarian – the Chalice Singers, our Children's Choir, and all of us together – our congregation. You can look forward to hearing our choir sing some of the songs we learned with Dr. Barnwell, as well as singing some of them together as a congregation. This year, I invite you to show up fully to sing with and savor our beloved vocal community. Please attend our community singing events – our 3rd annual Revival (and Campaign Kick-off!) on Saturday September 24th, and our 3rd annual Holiday Carol Sing in December. And, as always, you have the opportunity each Sunday morning to “lift up your voice, be not afraid, sing to the power” of the faith, love, joy, hope – and deep gratitude – flowing within our community.

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Board Launched Prosperity Strategy Team

by Furman Brown

To fully reach our programmatic goals, including hiring a full-time assistant minister, we know we need to get creative and strategic. Here is a great way you can help. Our Trustees have enthusiastically launched a PROSPERITY STRATEGY TEAM to develop a multi-year revenue strategy that finds new ways to secure resources for First Unitarian – beyond relying so heavily on annual pledges.

Bonnie Adrian and Furman Brown are joining this team and look forward to a handful of others joining as well. This group will be generating ideas, prioritizing plans, and channeling the fundraising energy of the congregation.

We plan to meet monthly with follow-up work as needed and seek people who fill any of these valuable skillsets:

- Interested in researching what other churches and nonprofit have done successfully
- Collaborative and committed to working with the congregation to generate ideas and plans.
- Talented at messaging about church fundraising
- Skilled at keeping our team organized and on track
- Creative and Innovative

If interested, reach out to Furman at furman.w.brown@gmail.com

REMINDER!

Have you been to a couple of services and wondered more about the roots of Unitarian Universalism? Have you been involved in a Core Circle and really gotten to know the congregation? Are you ready to embark on a journey of the mind, heart, and spirit? Then our “Finding Yourself at First Unitarian” is made for you. It is **Saturday September 17th at 9:00a**. Register with the office by email or phone (303-831-7113 x0).

Going Strong

by Chris Hahn, Board of Trustees President

At the beginning of a new church year, you should know that our financial situation is strong, and that we have many extraordinarily sharp and responsible people making sure our finances are well taken care of. I would like to briefly share with you the way we talk about four major pieces of our finances.

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Racial Justice Project is Off and Running!

by Amanda Trujillo and Sherri Stover, Racial Justice Project Co-Chairs

In May, 2016, our congregation voted to have Racial Justice become one of our social justice projects. There has been a lot of interest about what this will look like for First Unitarian. We had a very well attended planning meeting in August and our project is starting to take shape. We want to share with the congregation what we're planning. Along with the sharing is a big ask for those of you who feel passionate about these issues. Please look over the initiatives listed below and find one (or two!) that interest you. Contact the person listed and get involved. It's very satisfying to get in at such an early stage while the groups are newly forming because you can have a big impact on where they'll head.

One activity that is being planned for some time in November is a discussion of the book "Between the World and Me" by Ta-Nehisi Coates. More information will follow about specific dates and format of the discussion, but we wanted to let you know about the book now so you can start reading it.

We chose our Racial Justice initiatives at First Unitarian based on the Racial Justice Project Application Goals that were submitted to the Faith-in-Action Council last spring.

SURJ Project. Contact TBD. SURJ stands for Standing Up for Racial Justice. It is a national network of groups and individuals organizing white people for racial justice. This summer, FUSD became involved with a Learning Project run by SURJ to help us, along with other mostly white congregations, figure out how we want to participate in dismantling white supremacy and work on meaningful actions for racial justice in our community.

Religious Exploration. Contact Jordan Licari (jordanelicari@gmail.com). Let us continue to work on integrating messages and actions of racial justice into all aspects of our congregational life, including RE.

Book/Movie Group. Contact Trudy Glidden (trudyg@rcn.com). During the course of the year, there will be opportunities to do group reads with discussions and watch/discuss movies that address issues of racial

"This year, I am very excited that we empowered a Prosperity Strategy Team to focus on building our income outside of pledging members and friend."

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1) The annual budget (\$566,000 this year.) Every year in May, the Finance Council and Board make a budget to plan our income and expenses for the upcoming year. We strive to make a balanced budget, where income equals expenses for the year. Our largest source of income (by far) is pledges from members and friends of the congregation. Our biggest expenditure (by far) is for staff, who make all of our amazing programming possible. This year, I am very excited that we empowered a Prosperity Strategy Team to focus on building our income outside of pledging members and friends. They will be generating ideas, prioritizing plans, and channeling the fundraising energy of the congregation. Hopefully, with the additional income raised and our plans for new fundraising in 2017-18, we will be able to hire a full-time assistant minister at the end of this church year. Please see Furman Brown's piece (on page 5) introducing the team and sharing how you can help.

2) The building renovation project and capital campaign

(Estimated \$2,600,000, raised and spent 2016 - 2019.) The foundation for this work was laid when we rewrote our mission and vision in 2013 and approved a new long range plan in 2014. Our plan makes it clear that we want to stay in our current urban location, and that we need to invest in our building for the future. Our congregation is truly blessed to have a large, immensely talented and spirited group engaged in making this happen. Please join me and the Board in supporting them with your generosity and enthusiasm! The kickoff of the campaign on the evening of Saturday, September 24th will be one event that you do not want to miss!

3) The property escrow account (Currently \$40,000.) In a "normal" year, when we are not launching a building renovation, this is the fund through which we pay for all major repairs to our building. Our property management committee oversees this fund and decides when to spend from it. Ideally, our annual budget would fund the property escrow account sufficiently to maintain our building and its finishes into perpetuity. In reality, when difficult decisions need to be made about the budget, this line item is often reduced or cut entirely in favor of other priorities. Fully funding our property escrow account is another goal of the Prosperity Strategy Team. If we are successful in consistently funding this account every year, our next Capital Campaign (in 2050?) will allow us to achieve truly extraordinary things.

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4) The endowment (Currently \$245,000.) This is our nest egg and rainy day fund. Our goal is to grow our endowment to \$500,000 or \$1,000,000. Once it reaches this level, we can begin using any investment income it generates as additional funds for our annual budget. Please consider joining the many people who have put First Unitarian in their wills and have helped to grow our endowment to its current level. If you do (or if you already did), let someone on the Finance Council know so they can thank you.

This is a very simplistic and high-level view of our finances. I have not even started to talk about all the great ways we have engaged in seeking grant funding this year, or about how the capital campaign has improved our recordkeeping, or about our successful financial audit.

Of course, First Unitarian is much more than its financial assets. If we stay focused on our Mission, our Vision, and the ways each of us is inspired and touched and deepened by our relationship with First Unitarian, our beloved congregation will continue to thrive. Thank you, dear Ploughshare reader, for being a part of this great endeavor.

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City/State Legislative Advocacy. Contact Julie Meyers (julie.meyers.md@gmail.com). We will keep track of various city and state-wide initiatives and keep the congregation apprised of when they should take action.

Incorporating Racial Justice Themes into Sunday Worship.

Contact Ann Weaver (justanine@comcast.net). If we are serious about this work, we need to be talking about it frequently and publicly.

Core Circle Racial Justice Topics. Contact Micki Boling (mickiboling@yahoo.com). Many of us already meet monthly in small groups to discuss topics of great import. This group will develop a sampling of Core Circle discussion topics related to Racial Justice that will be available to all Core Circle leaders. Leaders can decide which topics might be relevant for their particular group.

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Direct Action Training. Contact Amanda Trujillo (atrujillo12346@gmail.com). After we educate ourselves, we need to act. There are local organizations that can train us so we can better participate in local actions.

Joining Existing Local Organizations. Contact Amanda Trujillo (atrujillo12346@gmail.com). Black Lives Matter and Standing Up for Racial Justice have local Denver chapters. By being present at their meetings, we can do important work together.

As you can see, we have a very ambitious plan. We can't do it without you. Please get involved by contacting the person listed on the project you want to work on so we can make this the beginning of a very successful transformation. In May, we committed our congregational energy to the fight for Racial Justice. Now, we need to show the depth of our commitment by engaging in action.

Notes from our Legacy

by Susan Robertson

Huge congratulations to First Unitarian for achieving local Landmark designation!! As we further dig into our archives and continue conversations with the folks who have been near and dear to the church over the years, we continue to learn about additional people and events that were not highlighted in the application. For example, life-long FUSD member Betty Pingle was kind enough to tell us about M. Walter Pesman, one of her mentors in the church during her youth.

M. Walter Pesman was born in the Netherlands in 1887 but moved to Colorado after a bout of tuberculosis at the age of 18. He became a renowned Denver landscape architect and the author of a wildflower identification book called "Meet the Natives." Today, a 2.9-mile hike near Echo Lake is named in his honor. One of the most visible pieces of his legacy is the curved streets in the Bonnie Brae neighborhood, which he designed in concert with fellow landscape architect S.R. DeBoer.

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Per info from the Cultural Landscape Foundation, Pesman and DeBoer “departed from the typical city grid and instead developed a network of interlaced curvilinear streets hinging from a diagonal boulevard that bisected the 640-acre subdivision.” Pesman’s legacy also includes landscape for a variety of Denver schools (including Lake and Skinner Middle Schools), the Country Club Gardens, and the Central City Opera. When employed by the State Highway Department, he beautified many of the state highways throughout the State. Pesman helped found the Denver Botanic Gardens and is one of 149 professionals whose biographies appear in “Shaping the American Landscape” by Charles A. Birnbaum.

Whole Souul Living

by Rev. Mike Morran

*“If you don’t know where you’re going,
any road will take you there,
and any leader will do.”*

Vision is the Whole Souul Living Theme for September and we will be exploring Vision in a number of ways throughout the month. Perhaps the single most overlooked step on a spiritual journey of any kind, articulating a vision of where we want to go is always time well spent. What are our goals? Who and what do we wish to become? Experience shows that simply imagining the details of our vision dramatically increases the odds of moving in that direction.

Having a Vision is a personal and communal practice we should take seriously, and the following questions are intended for both individual and communal reflection. There is wisdom in casting a vision. And, there is wisdom in letting go of a vision when time and circumstances conspire.

Here are some questions for personal and communal reflection.

- What is your vision for yourself? Spiritually?
- What long and short term goals have you set?
- What long- and short-terms goals would you like to set?
- What vision have you had to let go of?
- What wisdom have you gained from having a vision?
- What wisdom have you gained from letting one go?