



Ploughshare

A Piece of Mike's Mind by Rev. Mike Morran

By request, my column this month is what I shared on April 30th about racial justice, white supremacy, and white fragility during morning Sunday morning worship. What follows are those words....:

Some background is necessary for what we are up to this morning.

About six weeks ago, our denomination, the Unitarian Universalist Association was hiring a lead staff person for the Southern Region. There were two final candidates, a straight white male minister, and a queer Latina lay person, both supremely qualified for the job. The male minister was hired. The woman was informed that she was "not a good fit." Shortly afterwards, the woman wrote an open letter to the national board of trustees, a very careful, clear, and pointed letter.

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The Colors of Us by Erin Kenworthy, DRE

I attended my first SURJ meeting two years ago. SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice) is a network of groups dedicated to organizing the white population to engage in meaningful and supportive actions for racial justice. In the spring of 2015, the Denver chapter had recently organized, and was working closely with Black Lives Matter 5280. Through discussions, workshops, and presentations, participants began or continued their own learning around the deep systematic racism in place in our community. Contrary to my own lifelong belief that mistakes were evidence of personal failing, SURJ encouraged us to embrace our mistakes, to expect that we would make mistakes in our racial justice work.

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In it, she observed how many times the denomination has claimed to stand for racial, gender, and cultural diversity over the past fifty years, yet how few women and people of color were included in leadership. She pointed out that some seventy percent of senior leadership in the denomination were straight white men, and for an explicitly anti-racist, anti-oppression organization, this was and is a problem. That letter got sent everywhere.

Mostly through social media, UU Clergy and other leaders from all over the country named this problem as a systemic issue that needed to be addressed, grieved the lack of progress this hire signaled, and called us to live up to our stated values.

In response, Rev. Peter Morales, president of the denomination wrote an open letter that caused even greater division with its defensiveness, particularly because he used the word hysteria to describe the concerns that were being expressed. Ouch.

Two days later, after taking great and righteous heat, Peter resigned as president, probably correctly sensing that he had lost the trust and confidence of the clergy and the association. He blew it, and he knew it.

Since then, two other white men in senior leadership positions have resigned, and the man who was offered the job for leading the Southern Region has now declined the position. The institution is reeling, and the national board of trustees has appointed three interim co-presidents to serve until the next president can be elected on June 24th. Three beautifully qualified, faithful, and visionary people of color.

In the midst of this, an organization called Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism put out a call to congregations, requesting that we interrupt our regular schedule and have what they call a teach-in, dedicated to naming white culture, white supremacy, white privilege, and looking deeply at how these work in our faith.

That's what we are up to this morning. We are one of over 600 Unitarian Universalist congregations that have answered that call.

Since what we are about this morning is telling the truth, we should tell the truth about ourselves here at First Unitarian Denver. Our record on racial awareness and welcoming is frankly mixed. And I am personally as guilty of getting it wrong as anyone. I'll give just a few examples.

You'll remember Rev. Jamil, who was our Director of Religious Exploration last year. About a month after he started with us, we were at a meeting to discuss some initiative, maybe six people around a table, and fundraising came up. Specifically, someone used the word stewardship. Keep in mind that Rev. Jamil had grown up in a church and has a Master's degree from Naropa University. Someone reached over to Rev. Jamil and said, "That's our word for fundraising."

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Engaging in this transformative social change was not, and could not be an exercise in perfectionism. It was going to be messy, uncomfortable, and personally challenging. Two years later, it still is. What has changed though, is my own willingness to engage in the difficult discussions, to make my own mistakes and learn from them.

As parents, we wondered how to engage our family in activism. What conversations were appropriate to have with a three year old white male child? SURJ leadership created a families page that helped us find and integrate children's literature that modeled diversity, had main characters of color, and would support us in our discussions with Owen. One of my favorites was "The Colors of Us" by Karen Katz. Owen enjoyed this book, and still describes his own skin as "peachy". He regularly talks about the colors of skin that he sees, which can be fairly uncomfortable for his parents when we are in public spaces. Yet, it's factual, and a direct resistance to the colorblindness that was championed during my own formative years. We brought Owen to marches, let him run and play with the children of many colors while he learned to chant "Black Lives Matter." We continue to engage with him in discussions about race, inclusion, and activism. The discussion and activities change as he ages, and we are in no way sure that we are doing in "right". What is more important, as I learned at SURJ, is that we are doing it.

If you are looking for resources on how to begin these discussions with children of any age, there are so many great resources online and in our community. Most recently, I've been impressed by the resources gathered by the Black Lives of UU collective in their preparations for the denomination-wide White Supremacy Teach-In. One resource of note, Safety Pin Box, has excellent user friendly materials created by women of color, one of whom is a Unitarian Universalist. Our own Racial Justice Initiative used their materials to facilitate an in depth discussion of white supremacy last week. This week, Safety Pin Box has announced their creation of an 8 week series for kids. We've ordered our "backpack" and will use it this summer at home.

Whatever age you are, engage in the process. Do not fear your mistakes, expect them, learn from them. Seek out opportunities to learn, to listen, and to reflect on your own experience with white supremacy. And then, keep going.

In peace and encouragement, Erin



A Piece of Mike's Mind from page 2

I was at another meeting where a group of parents were confronting our former youth advisor, a young man of color, about a decision he had been involved in that they didn't like. Imagine one employee of color almost surrounded by five people with an agenda. This is a guy making like \$12 an hour for a 12 hour/week position, and at one point the parents demanded to see his job description and started dissecting it on the spot. I've seen plenty of people unhappy with a staff member for any number of things, but I've never seen that before.

And I am just as guilty. One time when Rev. Beth, Rev. Jamil and I were in my office planning a workshop on race and racial justice, and I was doing what I do when I have an idea I am invested in, and I effectively shut Rev. Jamil out of the conversation in ways I was totally unaware of at the time. I had turned my body towards Rev. Beth while dismissing something he had said. And the only reason I know that this happened is because a few days later Rev. Jamil blessed me by sharing what he had experienced.

The truth is that both of these men of color, staff members here at First Unitarian, experienced this kind of thing regularly. Even daily. It is not entirely random that both of these men resigned, and both of them felt that they had not been treated especially well.

Two things about this...: First, I'm not sharing this to beat us up or because I want anyone to feel guilty. I'm sharing this because we are being asked to be more honest about where our ideal of diversity meets the reality of multi-racial, multi-cultural relationships in terms of inclusion, valuation, and sharing power.

Second, I want to point out that neither Jamil nor Marcus talked about this much while they were here, partially because this is life for people of color who live and work in a world dominated by white privilege and white culture. And partially because they would be bringing it up all the time and, A), it's exhausting. And B), because what typically happens if they do bring it up is that white people get defensive. "I'm not racist." "I don't even see color." "Race had nothing to do with it."

Activists and racial scholars call this white fragility, and it's one of those things white culture doesn't even see. But once you do see it, you see it everywhere.

John Metta wrote: "...*here is the irony, here's the thing that all the angry Black people know, and no calmly debating White people want to admit: The entire discussion of race in America centers around the protection of White feelings.*

... *The reality of thousands of innocent people raped, shot, imprisoned, and systematically disenfranchised are less important than the suggestion that a single White person might be complicit in a racist system. This is the country we live in. Millions of Black lives are valued less than a single White person's hurt feelings.*

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White people and Black people are not having a discussion about race. Black people, thinking as a group, are talking about living in a racist system. White people, thinking as individuals, refuse to talk about “I, racist” and instead protect their own individual and personal goodness. In doing so, they reject the existence of systemic, cultural racism.”

This is why I don’t like the story of the good Samaritan. Everyone likes to think of themselves as the person who sees someone beaten and bloodied and helps him out.

That’s too easy. If I could re-write that story, I’d rewrite it from the perspective of Black America. What if the person wasn’t beaten and bloody? What if it wasn’t so obvious? What if they were just systematically challenged in a thousand small ways that actually made it easier for you to succeed in life?

Would you be so quick to help then, or would you, like most White people, stay silent and let it happen. Here’s what I want to say to you: Racism is so deeply embedded in this country not because of the racist right-wing radicals who practice it openly, it exists because of the silence and hurt feelings of liberal America.”

Unitarian Universalism, and Unitarian Universalist congregations are in a tender time. There are wonderful, thoughtful, faithful leaders of color who are asking us to listen, to reflect, to put ourselves in their shoes to the extent that we are able. We are being asked to invest the time, the effort, and the discomfort to travel this road together toward a truly diverse, truly welcoming, more truly aware and faithful denomination.

Committed to this transformative work, Mike

A Message from Abundance by Kimberly Urish

With many new visitors every Sunday and scores of new Members, First Unitarian Society of Denver is a flourishing and vibrant place to be. For many members, FUSD has always been a magical place. I was chatting with Sally Isaacson and she recalled a conversation with a friend about the religious right to which this friend said, “Well, you feel that way because you’re a Unitarian.” And Sally replied, “What is that?” Some years later, she searched for a Unitarian church and found First Unitarian only 5 blocks away from her house. She visited with her daughter, Amy, who raved about the Religious Exploration program after their first visit. Amy was so excited that the kids were allowed to ask questions! This was 24 years ago and they have been huge fans ever since. I’m sure others have great stories of their first experience at FUSD. We would love to hear yours – please send a message to: abundance@fusden.org.

Money, Professional Ministry, and a Budget Forum by Chris Hahn, Board President

People tend to remember where they were when trauma strikes. For me, one such time was in early 2016. I was in the church office when our assistant minister Rev. Beth Chronister tactfully told me she would be leaving First Unitarian. I exclaimed, “Crap!” before recovering ungracefully and asking about her future plans.

It was a traumatic time because our assistant minister filled a vital role in the life of our congregation. I would miss Beth personally, and our congregation would miss the care and leadership she provided.

Our budget calculations at that time did not allow us to fill Beth's position for 2016-17—which brings us to the present, and the purpose of this article. Hiring an assistant minister remains a potentially urgent need for our congregation. But there are several complications.

Our building renovation project starts this July, and Mike will be going on sabbatical from November through the end of March, 2018. Even without these complications, it's too late to recruit a highly qualified minister who would start in September of 2017. There is discernment to do before we can put out that job posting. What should we have our proposed assistant minister focus on? Should we “hire” a minister or “call” a minister? Answering these questions will require some thoughtful conversations. The board has asked the Committee on Ministry to begin this process.

Finally, we want to make sure we have the financial stability to keep a full-time assistant minister for the long term. To this end, the board empowered a Prosperity Strategy Team to investigate how to increase our annual revenue. One outcome of their work is the planned formation of a Development Council to oversee and increase all of our revenue, including annual pledging, the auction, planned giving, grocery certificates, and other sources.

In addition, we have come to the conclusion that we need ongoing professional assistance to make our Development Council successful. Following the model of our well-executed capital campaign, we propose to hire a part-time Development Coordinator for the 2017-18 fiscal year. This will help us continue the momentum of our capital campaign into our annual pledge campaign. It will also allow our volunteers to focus on the connective aspects of our fundraising, feeling confident that the administrative duties are consistently taken care of.

You are invited to dialog with the Board and Finance Council about these matters at our Budget Forum on Sunday, May 21st at 12:30p. Due to the Colfax Marathon, there will be one service that day at 11:00a. Also, please put the congregation's annual business meeting on your calendar: June 4th at 11:00a. Unfortunately, the size of our congregation does not allow us to go into issues in great depth at our annual meetings. If you have comments you would like to share, but cannot attend the budget forum, please find me at coffee hour or email me at president@fusden.org. Thank you!

Building Renovation Update *from the Building Renovation Team*

In the past month, the BRT has been busy reviewing design drawings and updating project costs. We are pleased that our current project cost estimates are consistent with our projections from March 2016, even though there have been a number of adjustments to the project plans. Read on for details about these adjustments.

We are now completing the design phase of the project and will submit construction drawings to the City of Denver in early May. We are hopeful that our plans will make it through the City in eight weeks, which would allow us to start construction in July. However, given the unprecedented building boom happening in Denver right now, it is likely the permitting process will take longer. Our construction start date is dependent on our plans being approved by the City, so at this point we can't say with any certainty when we will be able to begin construction. We'll update the congregation as soon as we know more, so stay tuned.

We have had to make several adjustments to the plans to address concerns from the City or conditions encountered by our design team, which is normal for a project of this scope. Major changes concern the installation of sprinklers in the basement, the switch from an evaporative cooling system to air conditioning, and the decision to rebuild the exterior ramp in place.

Sprinklers: After code review and discussions with the City of Denver, our architects determined that a sprinkler system for the basement is not required. They also found that if we chose to install a system voluntarily, we would trigger compliance with other provisions of the building code that would add significant cost to the project. Our new basement configuration improves ingress and egress and our staff has plans in place to increase fire safety and training, including implementation of periodic fire drills. Given the improved safety of the new design and our safety planning, we feel comfortable choosing not to install sprinklers at this time.

Air conditioning: The decision to move from evaporative cooling to air conditioning is due to the physical constraints of our building. Our current evaporative cooling system can cool only half of the building at a time. Under current code, if we install a new evaporative cooling system it must be sized to cool the entire building, which would require a unit twice the size of our current unit. We do not have the space for a system that size. Air conditioning will enable us to improve comfort for building users and cool the entire building at one time, which is more consistent with the number and variety of current users. Any increase in electricity usage should be offset by more efficient lighting and heating systems that will be installed during the renovation.

Please see *Renovation update* on the next page

Renovation Update from the previous page

Exterior ramp: After additional review of the exterior ramp, we have determined that the best approach is to rebuild the ramp in its current location. This allows us to stay within our current fundraising budget and maintain accessibility to the building. The newly reconstructed ramp will be a visual improvement, will incorporate additional safety features, and is anticipated to have a life of 25-30 years.

The Building Renovation Team looks forward to sharing the details of the revised plans, budget and timeline with you at the congregational meeting on June 4th. Please forward any immediate questions or concerns to the BRT at kathycranmer@comcast.net. We appreciate everyone's participation, thoughtfulness and graciousness as we continue to work through the details of this once-in-a-generation project.

Timeline:

(PLEASE NOTE: Projected construction dates are subject to change as we work through the permit approval process with the City of Denver.)

May 2017

- Submit plans to the City of Denver
- Church is prepared for city inspections
- All groups/individuals clean out storage areas
- May 27 - All-Church Clean Out Day: garage sale items to Community Room
- End of Capital Campaign Celebration, May 28, 2017
- All church and neighborhood, all FREE
- Ice cream, cake, games, music, FREE GARAGE SALE
- The MOVERS AND SHAKERS load and take all extras to donate to charity

June 2017

- City inspections towards approval continues
- The RENOVATORS continue early demo and storage renovation
- Use of building winds down
- All renovation areas packed up and cleared by June 30

July 2017

- Church rentals and outside use end
- Phase 1 renovation begins (sanctuary, basement, mechanicals)
- Church building open only for staff use
- Summer services in alternate location for 2 months
- Meetings and activities off site

September-October 2017

- Phase 1 construction complete
- Phase 2 begins (Community Room, 1st floor restrooms, kitchen)
- Services in remodeled sanctuary, RE in basement classrooms
- New exterior ramp complete

December 2017

Completion of all interior construction for Christmas????

2018 Complete exterior repointing work in phases determined by historical grants.

Our Flame is Blazing its way to the Top!

A big THANK YOU to everyone who has taken advantage of the Tip o' Flame Challenge Fund!

May is our final push to reach our \$2,400,000 congregational capital campaign goal. We enter May having raised 94% of this goal! We enter May with 266 commitments and the hope that everyone who has yet to commit to the campaign will do so, soon.

All contributions before the end of May will be matched, **dollar-for-dollar!**

Mark your calendar to attend the Capital Campaign Celebration event on Sunday, May 28th, right after the first (and only) service. We will celebrate our great accomplishment. There will be cake and ice-cream, games for the kids, an official unveiling of our historic plaque, and a "garage sale" for passing on items—free of charge—our church no longer needs (to help clean out for the renovation).

Capital Campaign Milestones in April

\$90,000 Tip o' Flame Challenge Fund

\$54,000 funds matched

\$2,260,000 raised to-date (94% of our goal)

Spring Cleaning for the Building Renovation

by Marty Dawley

Renovation means it's time to clean house. If you are part of a committee or group or are an individual with items stored at the church, make sure that you have talked with Marty Dawley (martydawley@yahoo.com) about your storage needs during renovation. All areas of the church will be affected.

Let's avoid storing items we no longer use. The church will be open to all groups on May 27th from 8:30a to 4:00p for cleaning out of closets and shelves. Let Marty know if your group will be working on the 27th and at what time. Marty will provide food, and those attending on the 27th also get the first chance to "shop" at our sale.

The next day, our sale items move out front for a free garage sale after the service. A cake and ice cream celebration of our historic landmark status and plenty of other fun will make the morning of the 28th a fun one at FUSD and our neighbors. At noon, volunteers will haul all our extras away for donation. Please, do not contribute items from home! But do bring our Capitol Hill neighbors. This is a great chance to let our neighbors know what's happening this summer and fall.

Whole Souul Living

Change is our Whole Souul Living Theme for May

"Whatever IS will be WAS." Thich Nhat Hanh wrote: "If you suffer, it is not because things are impermanent. It is because you believe things are permanent. When a flower dies, you don't suffer much, because you understand that flowers are impermanent. But you cannot accept the impermanence of your beloved one, and you suffer deeply when she passes away. If you look deeply into impermanence, you will do your best to make her happy right now. Aware of impermanence, you become positive, loving and wise. Impermanence is good news. Without impermanence, nothing would be possible. With impermanence, every door is open for change. Impermanence is an instrument for our liberation."

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- How have you typically reacted to change?
- Recall a moment in your life when you realized things would never be the same. Was there sorrow attached to that moment? Joy? Wonder? Something else?
- What are you working to change in your life right now? How?
- What are you clinging to that will someday be gone?

Wordless Moans and Sighs

by Daddy Goose38

Wordless Sighs and Moans
Enchantment

The bewitched, enchanted eyes and fingers
through which we see each other and all living things,
the Sun, Moon, stars and everything beyond,
are metaphorically seated in the heart.
When you let me feel
through your filmy, satin curves,
I see everything that you can show me,
both the visible and the secret,
and with an ethereal, shimmering radiance, as you do.
, Please, whisper me,
in wordless sighs and moans,
of all the colors, shades and hews there are.
Please, whisper to me, as only you can do ...
For whatever we arbitrarily call "real,"
is really just made of fantasies and dreams.

So come to me tonight.
Be hasty in your flight!
Fill my waiting arms,
love, and hold me ever, ever so tight.
Please, materialize for me tonight? ...
Please? ...
Please? ...
Please?
And now, good night!