



# Ploughshare

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

On the eve of sabbatical, I am reflecting on how proud I am of First Unitarian and the larger ministry of this community. Two weeks ago I was honored to accept a Civil Rights Award on behalf of First Unitarian at a gala event downtown. Last week I was honored to make a presentation about Immigration Justice to an international group of interfaith pastors. Almost weekly I get calls from congregations all over the country, of many different faith traditions, asking about how they can also become Sanctuary congregations. We are considered trusted accomplices in racial justice work by dedicated activists in and around Denver. We exceeded our fundraising goal for the much-needed renovations to our building. It goes on and on.

On one hand, I leave for sabbatical with unshakable faith that this community is strong, resilient, capable, and faithful.

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## ***Our Covenants*** by Erin Kenworthy, DRE

On October 29th our sermon explored mending broken covenants, particularly when it comes to the presence of sexual assault and violence that pervades American life. I felt, at the end of my piece, that I was a bit too lecture-y in my presentation of the differences between contract and covenant. I love covenants, and really enjoy the process that creates the intentional covenants we bring to life together. Often, the covenant process is easier to understand when you directly participate in creating one, rather than having that process explained to you. Toward the end of the sermon, Cindy invited each of us to re-covenant by writing our own agreements down in the lobby. I present to you here the list of covenantal elements that you shared, not attributed to any particular person, but

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I have tremendous confidence in our staff, our leadership, and the community as a whole. I know that when I get back in April, First Unitarian will still be the community I know and love. On the other hand, I will miss you! I will miss the music, the laughter, the sharing, and the children. I will even miss seeing the construction as it progresses on the building.

Yesterday, Glenn Barrows reminded me of the column I wrote on the eve of my last sabbatical nine years ago. Today, I don't think I can say it any better: "...the most important thing I have to say to you right now is that this is no time to sit back and wait to see what happens! In a world that is changing and shifting beneath our feet, it may be this is the time when you need your church the most. And, in this time of a minister's sabbatical, it is also the time when your church needs you; your ideas, your efforts, your participation, your love, your leadership. It ALWAYS works both ways. People get out of church, pretty much what they put in. Step up, get involved, make connections, feed your soul."

Much love,

Mike

## ***Polishing Grudges and Emerging Into Gratitude*** *by Cindy Pincus, Consulting Minister*

I love to hold grudges. I love to line them up on the shelf and admire them. I look at how well crafted they are, how clever their mechanism, how fine their finish. From time to time I take them down from the shelf and polish my grudges as I cradle them lovingly in my arms. Oh, my grudges are truly a delight to me.

I carry them with me everywhere I go. I'm happy to have a few at hand while browsing Peanut Butter options at Sprouts, fondly remembering how my friend forgot to bring the PB&Js on our hike. I like to wear a few on the charm bracelet around my wrist, thinking of how a long ago ex didn't even get me a christmas gift the year I thought I was getting a ring. From time to time, I'll wear one as large as a backpack as I jog around Cheeseman, admiring the sturdy weight of a grudge against friends who didn't invite me to their wedding.

And yet, despite these obvious joys I get from my trophy case of grudges, there is unfortunately a downside. I know, I know. How could there be a downside to grudgeholding when it keeps us so well protected from harm. Still, as I tenderly cradle my grudges, I find myself forgetting items in the grocery store while I mentally compose a mean-spirited tweet about sandwich forgetters. I spend more time thinking of all the things I won't be gifting to certain people this Christmas instead of keeping my eyes open for something that honors my friends and lovers today. And when I'm jogging around a beautiful park with a backpack full of vitriol, it eventually seeps through my clothes and I end up crying bitter tears of anger and regret while trying to crest the (very minor) hill near the Botanical Gardens.

Carrying grudges is an old and familiar habit of mine. One I love, that makes me feel safe and powerful in a complex world. I carry these things so I can feel smart, better-than, and wise to the ways of the world. And then my friends' wedding photos are published and I see they're both over-the-moon for each other, blissfully unaware of my superior emotional intelligence. I am, at last, always alone with grudges.

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but presented as our collective processing of what it means to be in covenant. How do we want to be together? Here, or in our families, or in our communities, or in our world. May this list receive changes, additions, and clarification.

- Respect every sentient being, follow the eightfold path
- Shareful
- To take the next step for me
- Live!
- To use my privilege to help others, to be aware of others pain and be in compassion with them, to exist in harmony with earth and all it's inhabitants.
- To go for the challenge even if I am...
- To live boldly, to be kind and truthful, to be compassionate and strong
- To go a thousand miles: then become present.
- To let go of resentment and negative assumptions
- Believe women!
- To live without shame, and help others do the same.
- Validate other's stories
- Share my story unabashedly and without shame; to create a safe space for all to share
- Listen
- To mend what is broken
- To act on what I believe
- Use my privilege to help others
- To give thanks for the gifts everyone in this community brings.
- To give my whole self to my work, to value it and share it.
- Use ouch/oops
- To live wholly and holy. Modest. Equitable. Simply.
- To speak up
- To help others
- To listen, learn, change, act, hold myself and others accountable. Repeat.
- Witness, then do.
- I promise to help others like they like to be helped.

May it be so, my people. Let us breath life into those covenants and agreements, and mend our broken world community with the thread of connection.

being a gracious guest. Throughout our time away from home, our community will also continue to host and welcome visitors and new members into worship and RE classes. What a beautiful and rare experience to be both guest and host simultaneously. If we approach this time as a chore, it surely will become one. I'd ask us to see this journey as a spiritual practice, one that nurtures our roots and spreads our branches, requiring us to grow and stretch in many directions. Our children do this naturally, every single day. They grow physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually without trying hard to make it happen. It simply does, and change occurs. May we all trust that process, be present to that process, and enjoy that process together.

With joy for the journey,

Erin

## *President's Corner* by *Stu Ferguson, President, Board of Trustees*

Over the last 2 months, about 7 of us have been attending a class called "Fighting Racism." I found it horrifying to look into the 400-year history of black slavery and the discrimination that continues today. The purpose of the class, run by Rev Dawn and Rev Twanna, was to spur a room full of whites into action. The point being that for all the civil rights gains in the last 50 years, we still have a culture of white privilege and supremacy. But what action should we take? The response of Rev Dawn and Rev Twanna was "If we knew, we would have done it by now." Their current thought is that maybe by engaging white allies, the whites can talk to their own about changing the culture of our society. First Unitarian has already taken some steps in that direction. This past spring the racial justice group sponsored Debby Irving who gave a sermon and workshop based on her book "Waking Up White". There are plans to continue programs to explore this topic and increase the call to action among our members. But what action to take? How can I or we with our black community partners bring about cultural change. Clearly, I am struggling to find an answer, as the old tactics haven't worked. Some of us lived through the 60's and participated in the cultural revolution of the time. It feels to me like we may be called to relearn that history and figure out how to chop down the tree of white privilege and black discrimination. The UUA and this congregation have a long history of activism dating back to the 1800's. My college was a stop on the underground railroad in Oberlin, Ohio. And I have participated in marches in the past. Reviewing our history of being an "ally" of the movement may help. An example was outlined in a recent New York Times editorial. \* It described an action at the University of Michigan where a group of black students sat down in the middle of the street surrounded by white allies in response to racist slurs painted on doors in the campus. Stopping traffic brought more publicity than just an article or position paper would have. Perhaps that is the first step, to call out and bring a bright light onto white privilege wherever I see it. I did try that with a friend over dinner a while ago. It ended with him getting very angry and I'm not sure I accomplished anything other than losing a friend. A TED Hour podcast \*\* described how important it is to reserve judgement and keep listening even when the attitude facing you is repugnant to your core. If we can couch arguments in terms of patriotism, moral values, and loyalty, we may be more persuasive in changing the underlying culture. Celeste Headlee described a leader in the civil rights movement, Xernona Clayton, who was successful in changing the mind of a KKK grand dragon by using these techniques and he resigned from the KKK. This is not going to be easy.

We have an opportunity over the next few months at Manual to engage with the school and community. I will be meeting with the principal, Nickolas Dawkins, to see where we might be able to assist in their programs already up and running. If more of us are called into action, maybe someone smarter than me will be able to help me figure out what to do and how to change our culture. I look forward to the struggle.

\* [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/21/opinion/sunday/fighting-racism-protesting.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/21/opinion/sunday/fighting-racism-protesting.html?_r=0)  
(Fighting Racism Is Not Just a War of Words By TIYA MILES OCT. 21, 2017)

\*\* <http://www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/archive?date=11-30-2017>

## *What Can I Do to Learn More About Racial Justice?* by Julie Meyers and Peggy Ulrich-Nims

The Racial Justice Project has been busy looking for opportunities to educate ourselves and take action. More on the action piece in months to come, but we still continue on the steep learning curve to understand racial justice issues nationally and in Denver.

Denver actually has a rich variety of opportunities to plug into. We hope this list will be useful and that anyone who has an interest will try to attend at least one meeting of one of these organizations. Many of us involved in the Racial Justice Project attend one or more on a regular basis and would be happy to tell you more, or carpool with you to an event.

### **Second Tuesday Race Forum** <http://www.secondtuesdayraceforum.org/>

Meets, obviously, the second Tuesday of each month at Park Hill United Methodist Church at Montview Blvd and Glencoe St. in Denver (where Araceli is in Sanctuary). This forum has been meeting for 17 years and is facilitated by 3 able folks (one of whom is Kenny Wiley, who has been involved at FUSD). This is an opportunity to have open, honest facilitated conversation about race among people of color and white folks. The next meeting is November 14th from 7:00p to 9:00p. The topic will be Preparing for Challenging Conversations around the Holiday Table. Newcomers are always welcome. No RSVP necessary.

### **Soul2Soul** <http://www.soul2soulsisters.org/>

Rev. Tawana Davis and Rev. Dawn Duval (both have preached at FUSD) run a 4 session class called Facing Racism for white folks to learn more about what they can do to dismantle racism. A group of us at FUSD just completed the class. The next class begins the end of January. It is free, but requires registration on their website. You will be provided with a robust reading list of articles and videos to watch and have lively discussions in the class.

### **SURJ Denver** (Showing Up for Racial Justice) <https://www.facebook.com/SURJDenver/>

SURJ Denver is a local chapter of a national network of groups and individuals organizing white people for racial justice. Meets every few months at Wash Park UCC. The next meeting isn't until Jan 23. Meetings have a theme and are educational with action oriented outcomes. They host many community actions which are posted on their Facebook page.

### **Colorado Black Women for Political Action** <http://www.coloradobwpa.com/>

They run a Courageous Conversation series that is open to the public (tickets must be purchased). The next event is Thursday, November 9th from 6:00p to 8:00p and is entitled Race, Crime and the Politics of Fear in America. Tim Wise, a prominent anti-racist white writer is the speaker. Several folks from FUSD plan to go.

## ***Another Racial Justice Project Option – Book Talk*** by Peggy Ulrich-Nims

The FUSD Racial Justice Project will continue the Book Talk program of last year with two events in early December. Peggy Ulrich-Nims will facilitate an evening and afternoon conversation on two important works by African-American writers:

*The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin written in 1963, and

*The Fire This Time* edited by Jesmyn Ward written in 2016.

Taken together, these two books present an overview of US race issues over the past 50 years.

An evening conversation is scheduled for Monday December 11<sup>th</sup> at the Community Room at 1433 Williams Street from 7:00p to 9:00p.

An afternoon conversation is scheduled for Tuesday December 12<sup>th</sup> at the Blair-Caldwell Library small conference room from 1:00p to 3:00p.

The books are short but powerfully insightful.; each is available in soft cover. Please start reading and do plan to join in one (or both!) of the discussions. Call or email Peggy if you have any questions: 781-910-5250 and [ulrichnims@gmail.com](mailto:ulrichnims@gmail.com)

## ***Faith In Action News*** by Amanda Parkhurst-Strout

The Faith in Action Council (FIAC) hosted a workshop on Saturday, September 30<sup>th</sup> for the various social justice projects, circles, and initiatives at FUSD. During this time of transition with the building renovation, FIAC want to foster connections among the FUSD groups as well as to share ways for the groups to engage all church members and visitors in the important work our church does.

These group members are a passionate bunch! They do this important work because they: want to beat back the forces of darkness, feel less alone, channel strong emotions and make a difference, put their spiritual practice into action, be a part of a like-minded community, and so much more. As part of the workshop, Angeles Ortega shared her thoughts on the challenges of getting people involved with social justice initiatives at FUSD. She said it's not enough to invite people to the dance – we need to invite them TO dance. Invite new people that you meet to tell you their stories – get to know them and in so doing you can engage them in the work we do and welcome them into our congregation.

Do you want to know more about the great social justice work being done by FUSD? There is room and a need for us all to participate, in big or small ways. Check it all out at: <http://fusden.org/faith-in-action-council>. Applications for new or renewing social justice projects are due to FIAC by March 2018, and we are here to help if you have an idea for something new, or if you need to know what to submit in order to continue your work.

## *Development Council Update* by Kimberly Urish

The Development Council has started acting on the recommendations of our summer Development Assessment to re-imagine our Abundance work into a new Year-Round Stewardship Program. This program emphasizes closer and more frequent communication with congregants from our Stewardship Team. The Stewardship Team is made up of Quarterly Team Leaders who will coordinate monthly Ambassadors. We are communicating with current Ambassadors about changes in our activities AND recruiting many new Ambassadors! If you have an interest in helping as an ambassador, please email Karen at [development@fusden.org](mailto:development@fusden.org) for more information. The Development Council will provide training, materials, guidance, and encouragement to Ambassadors. Also, we are currently training Ambassadors to use our new database, called ShelbyNext, which is an easy way to track all activities. As with any transition, we ask that you be patient with us. If you have a pledge to renew and have not been contacted, please reach out to Karen. Thank you very much!

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And so I began asking people, how do I let go of these things? The responses were as cliched and unhelpful as you can imagine. Try meditation. Try yoga. Try yoga and meditation. Write a letter and burn it in the mountains (and it's not easy for a Coloradan to willingly light things on fire near forests). Just 'let it go'. Try this anger management video. Jog more, jog faster, jog up a real hill. Journal about it. See a therapist. And on and on. And I promise I have tried all of these things and they do, to some extent, chip away at my precious trophies. And yet the mangled remains of resentment were still with me until I heard one suggestion that I Just. Couldn't. Do.

"Try praying for them," my mentor said. "And don't just pray for mediocre sunshine things, pray that they get every single thing that you've ever wanted in your life." NO WAY. Uh-uh, not a chance. They don't deserve any of what I want in my life, let alone all of it. And I told her as much. "Fine," she said. Have fun with your grudges. And so I happily developed a grudge against her to add to my collection.

Until one day in the park, I crested the small hill with a Santa's toysack-sized backpack of grudge hardening my heart. I burst into tears for no reason other than I was angry at what someone did three years ago, and I just started to pray. I thought of my long-ago friend and I fervently prayed that she have stable housing with lush houseplants and kind neighbors. I prayed that she find friendships with people that nourish her soul and will drink whiskey with her in a cozy kitchen on winter nights. I prayed that she win the lottery, twice. I prayed that people from all over the country would admire her stunning Instagram post of gourmet cooking projects. I prayed that no one she loves would ever die before her. I prayed that at least once a week, the barista would forget to charge her for her almond milk latte with cinnamon sprinkles. Nothing was too small, nothing too grand, to pray for my friend to receive.

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And it worked. My heart, not caring about my logical reasons for grudge-holding, began to glow and sparkle with all the joy I was wishing for my friend. I felt bubbly and alive and full the possibility of these prayers. I became excited at the thought of a wild, benevolent Goddess collecting my prayers like wildflowers and delivering them to my friend with flourish and a song. I stopped running, I looked up at the trees and my heart melted with the thankfulness of this beautiful autumn day in which I could wish all the goodness in the world on someone I loved.

And so, despite feeling so deeply cheated and angry, despite the unfairness I thought I had suffered in the world, gratitude came to find me anyway. Gratitude, relief, and joy were in fact always available to me as soon as I became willing to wish them on others.

Thanksgiving is a month when emotions are stirred as summer slides into autumn and winter. We gather with family both beloved and difficult. We re-engage with schooling and academic programs. We aren't yet reflecting on the year but we do feel the upcoming pressure of ending another cycle. It's always easy for me to look back at a year and find some empty space on the trophy shelf for a new, unresolved grudge. And yet, if I want to experience the promise of this season, I have to be willing to give what I never got.

Gratitude is our birthright on this planet and our connection with the overwhelming goodness of Creation. This Earth and Moon, these oceans and rivers, the Milky Way and the Horsehead Nebula; all belong to a grateful heart willing to set down small bitterness and surrender to the cosmic goodness of an autumn tree. So often we think of gratitude as something we must do and offer, and that's usually true. But let us always keep our hearts open to the hidden paths where gratitude, life, and Creation herself will come find us and set us free from ourselves.

## *Whole Souul Living*

Our Whole Souul Living Theme for November is **Generosity**, a topic both deeply complex (if we think about it too much) and astonishingly simple (if we simply follow the impulse). Consider the quote, “True generosity is guided by awareness.” The implication is that if we are truly aware...: of our interdependence, of our inherent connections, of the transitory nature of all physical things, of our own truest nature..., then generosity flows naturally. The corollary, of course, is that to the extent that we are un-generous, that is the extent to which we are also living un-aware.



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- What is your earliest memory of generosity?
- How generous are you with money or possessions?
- Is it fundamentally different to be generous with Praise, Gratitude, Time, or Love?
- What builds (or destroys?) generosity? For you? Or for others?
- What happens in relationships or community when people are generous with one another?
- Describe what is both hardest and easiest for you to share: Time? Money? Love? Possessions? Praise? Why
- What gifts are uniquely yours to offer to others? How did you learn this?
- What are some synonyms of “generosity?”