



October
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Ploughshare

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

In the past couple of weeks, about ten First Unitarian members and I have attended two workshops on understanding and facing racism. In both of these, the participants were overwhelmingly white. In one workshop, we were placed into small groups and instructed to share some of our earliest awareness and experience with cultural and racial differences. It was fascinating.

A woman told of having a Black nanny when she was a child and how one day, to the child's great delight, the maid put dozens of beautiful ribbons into her hair, just like she did with her own daughter. Her mother was NOT pleased when she got home! Another person told of spending six months in Japan while in High School. A couple people told of living near the edges of segregation lines in their small towns or neighborhoods, never understanding why people living so close to one another did not interact and even shopped in different places.

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Moving with RE by Erin Kenworthy, DRE

It's happening. We are temporarily leaving our building. On October 15th, we'll share our last Sunday services in our current building. On October 20th at 10:00a, we'll gather for one service at Manual High School, and will continue to do so until we get the OK to return to 1400 Lafayette St. While we are away, our home will undergo a physical transformation meant to support our congregation's important work well into the future. We will also undergo transformation as a community. Mike will depart for a much-deserved sabbatical shortly after we transition to our temporary worship home. What will happen?

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Another white woman told of being entirely ignorant of racism until one night in High School, on a date with her Black boyfriend, they were pulled over by a policeman on Colfax Avenue, and she was both bewildered and outraged at how the young man was treated. One person told of traveling through poor, Black neighborhoods in between the white suburbs where they lived, and the white business centers of their cities, troubled and confused because it was clearly another world, and because no one ever talked about it.

While there was no racial diversity in the group, there was great diversity in how we had witnessed, experienced, and learned about cultural differences and the racism inherent in American white culture. And while the facilitator didn't mention this, I think the point of the exercise was to demonstrate the varieties, the subtleties, and the ubiquitous nature of racism in the world. No one is immune, and no one is unaware.

The central teaching of that particular workshop was a model of understanding intercultural competence in five stages or categories: Denial, Polarization, Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation. In short:

- People in Denial tend to avoid cultural differences or multi-cultural experiences. They like to live as if their own culture is correct and exclusive, and don't have to be bothered with others.
- People in Polarization are intensely aware of differences, but tend to divide the world into "Us and Them."
- People in Minimization tend to downplay cultural differences and emphasize our common humanity, usually at the expense of acknowledging how racial and cultural differences define very different life experiences and very real oppressions.
- People in Acceptance recognize and value real differences, have genuine interest and curiosity about these differences, and understand that truth of other people's lives are valid and real.
- Finally, people in Adaptation are "...capable of shifting cultural perspective and changing behavior in culturally appropriate and authentic ways."

Of great interest was that all of the participants had taken an online test beforehand, designed to measure where we believed we were, and where we actually were on this continuum. No surprise, most of us believed we were at the Acceptance stage, but the test showed that we were really in Minimization. On reflection, this makes sense.

Like most models, this one is very useful if the limitations are recognized. The limitations from my perspective is that the model is over-simplified, inherently hierarchal, and rife with judgement. The usefulness is that it provides a common language for talking about and understanding a great many cultural assumptions and behaviors that are otherwise difficult to communicate.

On reflection, once again I am most impressed with how much there is to learn, and profoundly moved by what an authentically accepting world might look like.

Totally committed to making First Unitarian a model for that world,
Mike

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Well, probably a lot of new and different things. It's true that anxiety is in the air, before us lie the myriad opportunities that accompany the discomfort of change. I feel compelled to remind you that we will be fine. We will! Will there be moments when we get caught without something we might need? Count on it. There may be miscommunications along the way. Be forgiving. We've opened up ourselves to experience community in ways that are beyond our regular experience. It's going to be a fantastic journey, though not a completely smooth ride.

In RE, this move brings uncertainty and excitement for our children and youth. This building is a home for them, with comforts and quirks that are familiar. The disruption of leaving, adjusting to a different space, and returning to a home that doesn't quite look like home is a challenge for many of our kids who hold memories of this building and community as one and the same. On October 15th, we will hold a leaving ritual within the RE program. We will honor memories, share stories, express wishes, and anticipate being together through change that will change us. These experiences will bond us together in unforeseeable ways, create stories and legends, and become a part of our shared history.

On October 22nd, we will welcome ourselves into our temporary home, and will practice the art of 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

In Other News by Rev. Mike Morran

We had two candidates for the Consulting Minister who will serve in a limited ministerial capacity while Rev. Mike is on sabbatical. It was extremely close and difficult choice, but the Hiring Team is very excited to announce that Cindy Pincus will take on this responsibility. Cindy will be preaching twice each month - November through March, along with taking over some pastoral care, adult religious education, and consulting with the board and other leadership.

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

In a recent op-ed in the New York Times, titled “The ‘Madman’ is Back in the Building”, Zack McDermott graphically described his own bipolar psychotic break and his struggle to return to his previous work as an attorney in the public defender office. The focus of the editorial was his mother, who served as his “tether in a hurricane”. She was willing to support him even when he called in the middle of the night. Without this connection to unconditional love and reality, he was lost. His mother helped him to take life one-step at a time. After he stabilized, he aspired to find a way to be someone else’s tether. In my 35 years as a doctor, I often played that role in my patient’s lives. I have watched people struggle and sometimes need hospitalization when overwhelmed by their own inner turmoil. I am impressed at how tenuous is our hold on reality, especially when that reality is completely overwhelming. All of us, including me, need a tether to hang onto. Over the years, I found Cognitive Behavioral therapy was useful to me and my patients to work on beliefs and thoughts that were not lined up with the real world. But even with successful therapeutic tools, it is necessary to have that person you can call in the middle of the night. The person who will hold your hand in the ER and sit with you during traumatic times. Where can we go to find that connection? Church is one of the places to look.

When I first started coming to First Unitarian in 1982, I couldn’t wait for Sunday to come around in order to talk to some sane people who saw the world with a similar frame to my own. Some of our elders served as my tether to reality. Without that encouragement, it would have been difficult to handle the crazy-making situations in my job at Denver Health. Time has passed and now I am one of those elders. We have a rich resource in our community of friends who reach out to members and provide tethers to hang onto. The caring committee has organized a smoothly working way to get volunteers out to members who need meals, friends, and help dealing with the details of life. Having used them myself when I broke a hip, I know that it can be a lifesaver.

If you have found a tether at First Unitarian, pay it forward. See if you can reach out and be that tether in someone else’s life. If you are still looking, try one of the community groups such as core circle, the choir, or even a committee. It will help when the hard times come.

We are going through a time of chaos and transition with the building remodeling, Mike’s sabbatical, and moving services to Manual High School. But I am not anxious because I know my community will support me even if it is a little hard to find where they are meeting! The leadership of the church has been working hard to keep the connections tight no matter how strong the wind is blowing.

Racial Justice at First Unitarian

by Julie Meyers and Peggy Ulrich-Nims

In May of 2016 our congregation voted to have Racial Justice become one of FUSD's official justice initiatives. We spent the church year from September 2016 to June 2017 educating ourselves about issues of white privilege via book study groups, movies with discussion groups, pot lucks and monthly meetings. We ended the church year with a sermon and workshop by Debby Irving, author of *Waking up White And Finding Myself in the Story of Race*. Over 100 people attended this workshop!

So what's in store for the Racial Justice Project this church year? We have some ideas, but we want to get your input as well. Please fill out our brief needs assessment (in the order of service or via survey monkey at this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LL2MPVM>). Come to our Racial Justice Project meeting on Tuesday, October 3rd from 7:00p to 9:00p in the Community Room at FUSD for further discussion. Or email one of us and let us know you're interested. We have an email list we can put you on that will alert you to our activities.

As Bryan Stevenson, head of the Equal Justice Initiative says, we must strive to do four things:

- 1) Get proximate to underserved,
- 2) change the narrative from fear/anger,
- 3) stay hopeful,
- 4) be willing to be uncomfortable. Let's walk this journey together.

That's just a quick taste of some of the details the team has been working on to get this project up and running. Hopefully my next update will be about our permits. Keep your fingers crossed and your eyes on the FUSD Capital Project website for news!



Whole Souul Living

Scripture is our Whole Souul Living Theme for October. Spiritual traditions like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and many others look to very specific, historic texts for inspiration, truth, guidance, or comfort. For our purposes, solidly in the liberal religious tradition, we will more broadly define Scripture as, “Anything we turn to for guidance, truth, inspiration, or comfort.” Even nature, love, music, or silence could be scripture by this definition. This month, you are encouraged to spend some time considering the sources of your own inspiration and truth, and especially exploring or remembering some of the quotes, passages, poems, prayers, or books that have served this function for you.

Some questions for individual and communal reflection:

- What are the scriptures...; quotes, passages, poems, prayers, or books that have served you as sources of inspiration and truth?
- What memories, feelings, or thoughts arise as you think about identifying and re-reading your scripture?
- Imagine that the wisdom, knowledge, message, or truth of your scripture was desperately needed by someone you loved (for whatever reason). How would you try to share that wisdom, knowledge, message, or truth? Or, do you feel that people just need to learn things for themselves?
- Wisdom literature suggests that guidance and truth are all around us all the time, and the trick is being open it. Reflect on this openness... Can this openness be cultivated?



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