



Ploughshare

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

Actually, several pieces of my mind this month...

Here in the post-election world there is an overflow of commentary about our next president, what he will do, and how this could have happened. I will not add to that commentary here. What I will say is that First Unitarian has been committed to being inclusive, aware, spiritually grounded, and willing to put ourselves on the line for justice. That is not going to change. More than at any time in my own political life has the need for inclusive, sane, justice-seeking communities been more important or more needed.

In the coming months and years we will continue to faithfully live our spiritual tradition. We will continue to build partnerships with other justice seeking people and organizations. We will continue to grow souls in love and service, knowing that the vision that calls us forward is bigger than party loyalties or the shifting machinations of culture. I am convinced that the world needs us and we need each other. I am determined that a voice of reason, sanity, and compassion have a permanent home. I am committed that First Unitarian Denver continue to be that place.

In other news, you should know that our Capital Campaign is coming along beautifully! Our people doing the organizing and sweating the details are incredibly smart, caring, talented, and faithful. Our congregation continues to be incredibly generous and committed to the future of First Unitarian. If you haven't been contacted yet for a chance to contribute, don't worry! You will be! We need 100 percent participation. Whether you have resources to spare or only a few hours to volunteer, EVERYONE is wanted and everyone is needed to make this happen.

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Reflection

Be still, my soul, and steadfast.

Earth and heaven both are still watching
though time is draining from the clock
and your walk, that was confident and quick,
has become slow.

So, be slow if you must, but let
the heart still play its true part.
Love still as once you loved, deeply
and without patience.

Mary Oliver, from "The Gift"

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December 4th will be the congregational meeting where we will decide to go forward with detailing construction plans and hiring contractors.

Black Lives Matter banner update... We have decided to leave the paint-splattered banner in place for now. Most of us feel that leaving it there in its current condition makes a powerful statement of the justice issue while also clearly demonstrating the ugliness of those who oppose justice. Thanks to all who have contributed their thoughts to this issue.

There have been other conversations about adding a second banner to the one that was defaced: "We Shall Not Be Moved," or "You Can't Vandalize Love," or "We Are Not Intimidated," or something like that. Those conversations are tempered by concern for the building and the difficulty of getting the paint off of our beautiful (now officially historic) stone. At the moment, we are looking at ways to proudly and clearly display our banners, but possibly separating them from the building in a way that accomplishes both goals. Stay tuned and stay involved.

On a pragmatic note, please know that both Christmas Day and New Year's Day fall on Sundays this year. We will have our usual Christmas Eve services at 5:00p and 7:00p, but there will be no morning worship services on Christmas Day. Instead, the Ray family and Jessica Byler are organizing a Christmas Day festive potluck meal at church from 12:30 to 2:30. All are welcome, but please RSVP to Jessica Byler at Jessica.byler@gmail.com.

Faith in Action Council's Mission and Vision Update

Faith in Action Council met in retreat on October 30th. We scheduled the in-service to update our committee's mission and vision statements and goals to ensure our continuing focus supporting community-building social justice work at First Unitarian Society of Denver.

Our team agreed to the following updated mission and vision statements:

Mission

The First Unitarian Society of Denver's Faith-in-Action Council calls, encourages, and empowers church members and friends to work towards effective social justice while supporting each other in accordance with the FUSD Mission and in the spirit of UU principles.

Vision

First Unitarian will be known as a community leader on justice issues. Our work will change the world through love. We will engage in charity (helping others) and work towards justice (building a more just world). Our work will give a voice and power to act to people who are "helping" and those who are "being helped."

Other retreat agenda items included updating our annual project application for congregation approved social justice initiatives. One of FIAC's key functions is helping guide social justice initiatives through the process of becoming recognized as formal Faith in Action projects and the renewal of those projects. The application is a key tool in this process.

FIAC will be looking to replace several members on our rotating roster in June of 2017. Anyone interested in serving on this committee please contact co-chairs Brad Silsby or Stephanie Walton, or a member of the Leadership Development team.

Floyd Tanaka: A Model of Commitment and Accomplishment by Kathlene Sutton

When Floyd Tanaka died in 2008, First Unitarian lost an untiring champion of maintaining and improving our building and grounds. He would have been delighted with our current campaign to renovate and preserve the church—and undoubtedly would have worked diligently and creatively behind the scenes to help make it happen. Because that’s how he tackled all five decades of his quiet leadership at First Unitarian.

“The building was his baby,” Stu Ferguson recently said. And then Stu quickly added, “and the entire property,” since Floyd also helped design and bring to fruition and then maintain numerous landscaping projects. Trained as an architect and working for four decades as a city planner all over the world, Floyd contributed both architectural insight and pragmatic solutions to major church building projects--ranging from re-envisioning the sanctuary after the 1985 fire, to constructing the elevator and renovating the lower level to create the multi-purpose room.

When building-code requirements threatened to sabotage the planned multi-purpose room, Stu recalls, Floyd quietly negotiated with a key city official to keep the project alive by promising that it would be used as a Sunday School room and not a general meeting room for the congregation. Former board member Carol Welsh and three-term board president Bob Werner both recall how Floyd “seamlessly” took care of every problem brought to his attention, no matter how minor.

Raised as a Methodist, Floyd had followed his wife Rose to First Unitarian because of their shared commitment to civil rights and to raising their children in a liberal church. Rose and Floyd had met while imprisoned in a World War II relocation center in California, along with hundreds of other citizens of Japanese ancestry. After release, Floyd was inducted into the U.S. Army, serving in Italy during the Occupation years. (It was Floyd’s exposure to Italian architecture, Rose recalled, that led to his earning a combined degree in architecture and planning at the University of Denver after the war.)

Floyd’s involvement with the military took yet another ironic turn after he designed a major memorial to fallen Japanese-American veterans (including his brother John) at Fairmount Cemetery in Denver. U.S. Navy officials visiting the memorial were so impressed, Rose recalls, that they decided to “borrow” Floyd’s design for an Annapolis columbarium, where Navy veterans are inurned. After Floyd respectfully notified the authorities of the unauthorized use of his design, they added a columbarium plaque crediting his contribution.

First Unitarian awarded Floyd a “Lifetime Key” for his “long and meritorious service” in property management. For those wishing to honor him further, alongside Japanese-American veterans so seldom recognized for their sacrifices, Rose said that everyone is welcome to the annual Memorial Day ceremony at the Fairmount memorial he designed. “It’s always at 11:00,” she notes, “so there are no invitations: everyone knows when to come.” And they do, from all over the country, every year.



Racial Justice at First Unitarian *By Julie Meyers,* *Racial Justice Project*

The Election. Red paint on our Black Lives Matter banner for the second time. Foul language spray painted over uplifting chalk messages from UU teens on the sidewalk outside of First Unitarian a few days after the election. This is the reality of the world we live in. As UUs, these events call us to action.

The Racial Justice Project as FUSD is your gateway to action. We will be holding monthly meetings the first Tuesday of the month at FUSD, beginning on December 6th from 6:30p to 8:30p. The meetings will be an opportunity to learn more about racial justice issues and to find ways you can be active.

If you can't make the meetings, but want to be active, send your email address to Amanda Trujillo atrujillo12346@gmail.com and she will put you on our distribution list. We hope to send out a list of events happening in our community twice a month so you can choose what suits your availability and interest. You can also contact the folks listed on some of our working groups directly.

Current working groups are:

SURJ Contact Amanda Trujillo, atrujillo12346@gmail.com. SURJ stands for Standing Up for Racial Justice. It is a national network of groups and individuals organizing white people for racial justice. There is an active chapter in Denver.

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 justice.

Racial Justice Community Action Network 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.

CORE Circle Racial Justice Topics, Contact, Jane Derrick pjderrick@aol.com. Many of us already meet monthly in small groups to explore topics of great import. This group will develop a sampling of CORE Circle 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.

NEW EVENT: Monthly Racial Justice Pot Luck Lunch (following 2nd church service). Join us on Sunday, December 11th to share food, thoughts and ideas about Racial Justice issues. Please bring a dish to share. This will coincide with the People of Color at First Unitarian who will be resuming their pot lucks in the same time slot.

We hope you will find a way to get involved. It soothes the post-election soul!

The Fear That Surrounds Us by Rev. Peter Morales,
President, Unitarian Universalist Association of America
Reprinted from the UU World

In the 1990s, a few years before I went to seminary, I lived in a small town in Oregon that passed an anti-gay initiative. I was editor and publisher of the local newspaper. My editorials opposing the referendum had little effect. The ballot initiative amended the city charter to say that the city could not give homosexuals any special rights. The town was in a frenzy before the vote. Sadly, as I write this column more than a month before our national election, the hysteria I experience today feels very much like what I experienced in Oregon.

Part of what made the anti-gay initiative in my town so weird was that its passage changed nothing. The city had no special rights to give. What was it supposed to do, give gays a discount on library fines? Respond more quickly to fire alarms? Forgive parking tickets? Yet the emotions were intense.

What feels so familiar today are the fear, the anger, and the demagoguery. In my small town, people were made to fear for their children. They were convinced there was some vast homosexual conspiracy.

Demagogues always feed on fear. We live in a nation where a sizable number of people are deeply afraid. They are afraid for their economic future, afraid of blacks, afraid of Muslims, afraid of Latino immigrants, afraid of Chinese taking jobs, afraid of their own government.

But fear almost always comes in disguise, so we don't recognize it for what it is. Fear comes masked as hate, racism, homophobia, misogyny, religious intolerance, and even ignorance. It looks like an opinion, but it is a gut feeling.

When people are afraid, facts and reason are poor weapons. Have you ever tried to argue someone out of their racism, their climate change denial, their homophobia? I have. It never works. Telling an avowed racist that he should not feel that way is like telling a clinically depressed person to cheer up.

Why are so many of our neighbors afraid? We are a religious people who profess that we want to include everyone in the blessed community. We are part of the Universalist tradition, which affirms that love includes everyone. Everyone. Really. While you and I might be tempted to write off people we believe are evil, hard hearted, racist, stupid, and . . . (well, you can continue the list), that is not who we are. And ranting, as good as it feels in the moment—and no one likes a good rant more than I—doesn't help.

While ranting does not work, the opposite does. The opposite of ranting is listening. I mean really listening—with an open heart and an open mind. One thing this election season has taught me is how many of my fellow Americans feel left out, hopeless, vulnerable. To support mass deportations, a police state, exclusion of Muslims, and the romanticized equivalent of a white American caliphate is not a political agenda—it is a cry of despair. I believe that, as a religious people who affirm the power of love, we need to hear the cries, however strident, of the fear that surrounds us.

We have always been a people who affirm justice. I am proud of that. But right now we need to go beyond advocacy and protest. I think we are called to bring empathy, understanding, and healing. And this involves forming relationships with people with whom we most disagree. And this is really, really hard.

We must help frame a vision of a future that includes everyone. We must not only decry evil, we must build a foundation for hope.

Whole Souul Living

Our Whole Souul Living Theme for this month is **Divinity**. For traditional Christians, the word usually refers to the Christian God or the nature of Jesus. For Jews, divinity could apply to anything from the orthodox God of the Old Testament to the cosmic Ein Sof (without end) of Kabbahlistic teaching. For many Indigenous People, divinity could refer to the animating spirits of nature or the mysterious forces that turn the seasons or the world.

In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, we accept the findings of modern science, and we understand that the ancient wisdom and religious teachings from world religions have something deeply truthful to tell us. We celebrate that each of us will have different approaches, preferences, hopes, fears, and ways of understanding. And, we celebrate the nearly universal human experience of transcendence, revelation, connection that many associate with divinity.

Some questions for communal or individual reflection:

- What experiences, forces, powers, principles, or feelings, that actually exist in your life or experience do you identify as divine?
- Is there a plan or purpose for the universe and existence? If so, where does it come from?
- There are many names for divinity; God, Spirit, Being, Allah, etc. Emerson called it The Oversoul. The Tao Te Ching calls it the Tao. Einstein referred to a “Unified Field.” Whatever you call it, is divinity... Good? Evil? Indifferent? Conscious? Free?
- It is a fairly common saying that “God is Love.” But if God is Love, then Love must be God! Consider, even if just as a metaphor, that if Love is equivalent to God, then you only need to be capable of love to be inherently holy, and so is everyone else! Could this idea transform the world? Could it transform you?