

Ploughshare

Salvation in Unexpected Places

by Cindy Pincus, Consulting Minister

This has, by almost all accounts, been a terrible year. Hurricanes, floods, wildfires, the inauguration of a devastatingly destructive political regime, bombs, refugees, protests across the globe, and as always, dying animals, rivers, and oceans. And that's just the public disasters. I've known folks who, in the midst of all this, have lost jobs, homes, parents, loved ones, sense of safety and self, trust in religious community, trust in workplace safety, and so much more. Capable, and faithful.

The days here in Denver are short. The nights (this week at least) are long and cold. Any leaves remaining on the trees are either pine needles, or crumbly brown remnants of autumn. We are in that strange period of the American calendar between the delight of Thanksgiving stuffing and the unwrapping of Christmas and Hanukah gifts.

Please see *Salvation* on page 2

Inside This Issue

- 1 Salvation in Unexpected Places
- 1 It's About Time
- 4 President's Corner
- 5 Resource List from the Racial Justice Project
- 6 Development Council Update
- 6 FUSD Program/Functional Budget
- 9 Whole Souul Living

It's About Time by Erin Kenworthy, DRE

"It's a funny thing, how much time we spend planning our lives.

We so convince ourselves of what we want to do, that sometimes we don't see what we're meant to do." – From Looking for Salvation at the Dairy Queen, by Susan Gregg Gilmore.

Funny thing indeed. Time is a precious commodity these days, hard to find, and always in demand. It could be the holidays, or the amazing variety of ways to communicate, or the desire to say "yes!" more than no to commitments. Our plans can consume our ability to be. I find myself sometimes holding my breath, focused so intently on the next part of "the plan", and completely oblivious to what is happening in the moment. Even when the current moment is something I planned, I'll find my mind racing ahead to the next moment, event, or commitment.

Please see *Time* on page 3

Salvation from page 1

The Christian Liturgical calendar marks this period as Advent, a time of holy waiting with not much knowledge of what we're waiting for other than some kind of holy surprise. Pagan and Earth based traditions honor the darkness of this time of year, blessing the roots that are holding nourishment and life underground while the bare dirt sits frozen in our yards.

It's a strange paradox that now, at the end of a year like this, in darkness and cold like this, is when we are expected to be our most cheerful as a society. Looking at our theme for the month, *Salvation* (in this life), I wondered how that would take shape among us this year. I wonder what *Salvation* might look like among the diverse spiritual beliefs of our congregation, and within my own personal life.

While pondering this question, I took a trip to San Francisco to go see one of my favorite artists, Valerie June, perform at the historic Fillmore. She was everything I hoped she would be; talented, powerful, dynamic, and emanating some kind of strange and compelling spirituality. Two remarkable things happened during the concert. The first was almost incomprehensible in this Era of iPhone. Almost nobody had their phones out to photograph or film the concert and if they did pull out their phone to snap a quick photo it was quickly put away again. This experience was such a delight since I have become used to watching concerts on the 10-15 little screens that often block my view of the actual performer herself. It was magical, it felt like a miracle, and it kept all our spirits in the venue together and not off in the strange etherea of Facebook and Instagramland.

I couldn't understand why this was happening and why, during a show with so many perfectly hashtaggable moments, so few people were taking photos. It was exhilarating, though, and I reveled in the feeling of being back in 2006 before the first 'smartphone' was released and concerts around the world were viewed primarily through biological eyes and not the pixelated vision of 2017, beautiful though it may be.

Here is the second remarkable thing that happened which, I have a sneaking though unconfirmable suspicion, is related to the first. After June finished her set, she went backstage while we clapped and cheered for her to come back out for the encore. After a few minutes she reemerged holding a two-foot statue of a blue porcelain Buddha. Her band started playing the slow sweet notes at the beginning of her song "If And" while June carried the statue to the front of the stage. She kneeled on the floor, bowed her head, and for all intents and purposes began to meditate. This woman, who had just electrified us with her fiery singing and Tennessee guitar licks, now emanated a different kind of power. In the midst of the excitement of a live concert full of movement and noise and lights, she offered up to us one of the most intimate and peaceful spiritual practices on the face of this earth. We were totally in awe.

More than anything I saw that night, this has stuck with me most. I've never seen a musician do that during a live concert, let alone any other time. Valerie June showed us what it means to literally carry her spirituality with her wherever she goes. Now, I doubt that two-foot statue comes with her everywhere, but I could be wrong. What matters to me is that she was giving me a vision of what '*Salvation in This Life*' could mean. It could mean that we are unashamed of our spirituality, that we welcome our spirituality into every situation and through every door. It could mean that every gathering of people is an opportunity to connect to the divine.

Please see *Salvation* on the next page.

Time from page 1

I'll find myself gasping for breath.

Ferris Bueller once said "Life moves pretty fast, if you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." What was true in 1986 remains true today. How is it December already? It's about to be 2018 and I barely feel like I got a hold on 2017. What was it that I wanted to do this year? And what do I want to do next year? What am I missing?

Stopping momentum can be a difficult and dangerous thing, ask any physicist. Though, without stopping to look around, we face the very real consequence of missing out on unplanned, precious moments, opportunities, and connections. What are we meant to do? I believe that our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to find space for reflection, to pause our tendency toward busy-ness, and be present to ourselves and each other. Salvation may materialize in the spaces between events. A pathway toward salvation, or deeper meaning may reveal itself when we shift our focus from what comes next, to what is happening right now.

I know that I am meant to witness the look of pride and amazement when Bryce takes his first steps unassisted (any day now!) I didn't know it when I got that education degree, but I am meant to work as a religious educator. I am meant to face challenges that help me clarify and define my boundaries. We, as a community, are meant to grow, not just physically, but spiritually and socially. Finding salvation is likely more about the search than recognizing that we've reached a destination. So, as you search, remember to stop. Breathe. Look around. Be present. Then, adjust and continue moving, however you are meant to do so. Wherever you are, may you experience peace.

Blessings upon you during this winter season of reflection.

Salvation from page 2

It could mean that true power isn't noise, lights, bluster, movement, or distraction. True power is deep peace, shared with others. It could mean kneeling before the altar of the thing we have created, be that music or a lesson plan or a mail carrier route. It could mean keeping our phones in our pockets instead of letting them steal us away from the present moment.

Salvation in this life could mean that we celebrate ourselves for who we are - deeply spiritual and connected beings - and share that with as many people as possible. And this sharing is done not through telling or insisting, but through the very power of our beings allowed to peacefully shine free.

So as we reach the end of this wild year and assess the damage done and the difficult journey taken, pick up your Buddha statue, whatever that may be, and carry it with you. Sit in your power and pray or meditate with the people around you. Tap into your true power in this age of so much stolen, unearned power. And share it with us. Help us find our Salvation in this life; Salvation which is almost always nothing more than the deep knowing of ourselves as profoundly spiritual beings. You are, without a doubt, this season's blessing and I for one am delighting to be here on this earth sharing this blessed life with you, however you may express yourself.

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

"There is a story in Zen circles about a man and a horse. The horse is galloping quickly, and it appears that the man on the horse is going somewhere important. Another man, standing alongside the road, shouts, 'Where are you going?' and the first man replies, 'I don't know! Ask the horse!' This is also our story. We are riding a horse, we don't know where we are going, and we can't stop."

– Thich Nhat Hanh

The darkness at 7 AM and gray of my garden make it hard for me to get excited about the day's work. The holiday commercial barrage is everywhere and unavoidable. Even Christmas is not as cheerful as it used to be. My mother died Christmas Eve two years ago. This is the time of year to pay attention to my own mental health and take a moment for my own centering. I'd recommend we all make a conscious effort to be nice to ourselves and cut each other some slack. Here are some common-sense tips to prepare for the holidays: Appropriate budgeting for gifts and not going overboard is important. Maintaining healthy contact with family either reaching out or staying away depending on the relationship. Avoiding overindulgence especially with alcohol which can disrupt sleep. Addressing loneliness and isolation by engaging with friends and enjoying some of the free activities available. Overcoming feelings of loss by acknowledging them and perhaps creating new traditions in the memory of those who are not with us anymore. And finally, being aware of the seasonal effects with decreased sunlight and decreased activity levels.

I find practicing mindful meditation is helpful, even if it is only 10 minutes of checking in with myself at the start or end of the day. Thich Nhat Hanh says stopping the runaway horse is the first step in calming and healing. When I wake up in the morning I have a mantra that I say even if only half-heartedly. It seems to set a more positive outlook on the day. For me my mantra is "another day in Paradise." Having a positive attitude is helpful in staying patient and relaxed. Don't underestimate the power of having positive thoughts. Focusing on the joy of giving rather than the obligation and stress of shopping can turn giving into a spiritual practice. It can go a long way towards turning off the consumer commercials in my head. We must accept that we can't do it all. Being patient with friends and family is not always easy but we can try to stay relaxed even in a stressful situation. Remember that whatever you are dealing with is finite and look for the light at the end of the tunnel. Appreciate your good fortune and develop compassion for those less fortunate than yourself. Finally, getting some light from the sun and daily exercise can help with the seasonal effects.

As a community, it is important to reach out to each other. All of the tips for dealing with holiday stress work better with a friend. Our weekly "First Announce" has opportunities for connection and coffee hour is a good time to plan a lunch! I look forward to seeing everyone at our services and Christmas Eve at First Universalist.

Resource List from the Racial Justice Project

by Julie Meyers and Peggy Ulrich-Nims

In our continuing work to inform ourselves of the serious issues of racial justice in the US, we have compiled this initial list of books. Of course there are many more books and many other media/online resources which we will hope to describe in future Ploughshare articles. We also hope that you will let us know of other materials which you have found particularly informative and inspiring. Please contact Peggy Ulrich-Nims at ulrichnims@gmail.com with items which you would like to share with the community.

Between The World and Me Ta-Nehisi Coates 2015

We Were Eight Years in Power Ta-Nehisi Coates 2017

All Souls' Rising Madison Smartt Bell 2008

An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World David Walker 2015

The Half Has Never Been Told Edward Baptist 2014

The New Jim Crow Michelle Alexander 2010

White Rage Carol Anderson 2016

Eyes Off the Prize Carol Anderson 2003

The Fire NextTime James Baldwin 1962

Nobody Knows My Name James Baldwin 1961

Slavery by Another Name Daniel Blackman 2009

The Cross and the Lynching Tree James H. Cone 2011

Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America Michael Eric Dyson 2017

They Can't Kill Us All Wesley Lowry 2016

Blood at the Root: Racial Cleansing in America Patrick Phillips 2017

Citizen, An American Lyric Claudia Rankine 2014

Just Mercy Bryan Stevenson 2015

A Different Mirror: History of Multicultural America Ron Takaki 2008

Learning to be White Thandeka 2000

The Warmth of Other Suns Isabel Wilkerson 2011

Stamped From the Beginning:

The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America Ibram Kendi 2016

Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged and Profited by Slavery Ann Farrow, Joel Lang. 2006

The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How our Government Segregated America Richard Rothstein 2017

Waking Up White Debby Irving 2014

Bound for Canaan: Epic Story of the Underground Railroad, America's First Civil Rights Movement Fergus Bordewich 2006

NOVELS

Kindred Octavia Butler. 2007

Homegoing Yaa Gyasi. 2016

Underground Railroad Colin Whitehead. 2016

Development Council Update by Kimberly Urish

It's beginning to look a lot like... stress time! The holidays are upon us. Decorations are up. Holiday cards are arriving. Media constantly reminding us about how to make the holidays perfect. Donation requests are flooding mail and inboxes. As a professional fundraiser, I often comment that December is the fundraiser's Superbowl. WE ARE BUSY. Personally, this season is not my favorite. My family was Lutheran, Presbyterian, Reorganized Mormon and generally Agnostic. The only tradition I remember is the annual curse fest while putting leaves in our ancient antique dining room table. As an adult, I don't know quite how to feel about the holidays, but at First Unitarian, I don't have to decide. How wonderful!?! There are no expectations or need to choose. Instead, a dedication to service and helping others. While we navigate these complex feelings and experiences, I hope you will remember First Unitarian. Need a place to breathe, take a minute and contemplate? Need a reminder of sanity in this crazy world? Need a place to connect with like-minded friends? No matter YOUR reason for celebrating this season, First Unitarian is there for you. See you at Manual High School at 10 am on Sunday. (And I wouldn't be a fundraiser if I didn't say, please remember First Unitarian in your year-end giving plans.)

FUSD Program/Functional Budget by Andrea Mitchell

The Finance Council has recently completed the Program Budget requested by the Congregation at the 2017 congregational meeting. A program budget, as compared to the traditional "line item" budget divides the organization's resources into the major program areas to which FUSD has committed.

Purpose: The purposes of a program budget are many, including:

- a. Improve alignment of finances with mission/vision of the organization
- b. Provide insight into cost of programs
- c. Assist in identifying goals for fundraising
- d. Aid/guidance to staff in allocating time (e.g. when to escalate a request for extra time)

Methodology: We used the congregational approved Fiscal Year 2018 line-item budget as a starting point for the Program budget. There was extensive discussion at both Finance Council and the Board of Trustees about the appropriate program categories. This first version was developed using the following Program categories that were developed by Finance Council and approved by the Board.

- Sunday Services
- Music
- Religious Exploration
- Social Action
- Community Building

Please see *Budget* on the next page.

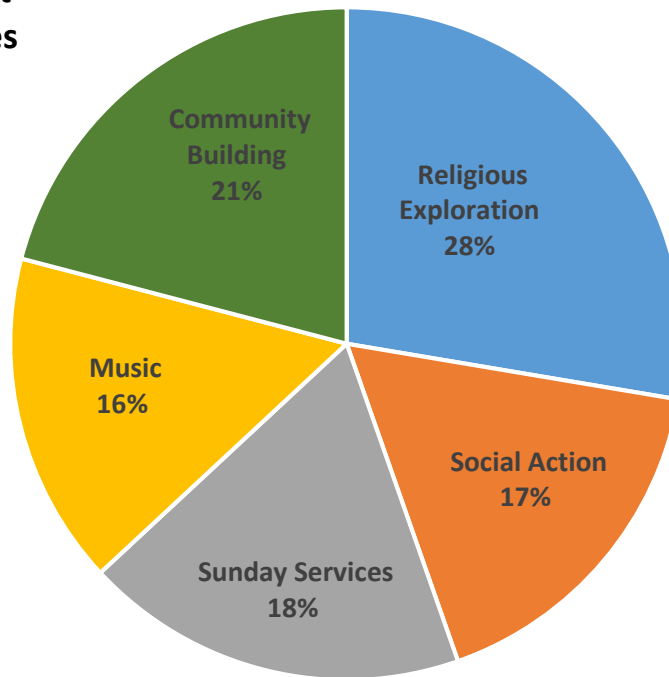
A program or functional budget identifies “both direct” and allocated expenses associated with each program. Direct expenses are those that are clearly devoted to a program. Allocated expenses are those expenses that while not directly tied to the program, do support the program. For example, Mike’s salary expenses are allocated in varying proportions, to all five programs. The table below summarizes the direct expenses for each of the 5 programs:

	Sunday Services	Music	Religious Exploration	Social Action	Community Building
Direct Salaries		Music Staff	RE and Childcare Staff		
Direct Committee Expenses	Sunday Services Committee	Music Committee Expenses	RE Committee Expenses	FIAC (and subcommittee) expenses Donations to 1 st And 3 rd Sunday community groups	Caring Committee Connections/Membership Library
Other Direct Expenses		Organ repairs, music rights, guest musicians			Denomination/UUA and Community Memberships (e.g. CHUM, Community Minister)
Indirect Salary Expenses	Senior Minister, Office Administrator, Development Director, bookkeeping staff, Building Superintendent, Events Manager				
Indirect Committee Expenses	Board of Trustees, Personnel, Finance Council, Development, Safety, Leadership				
Indirect line item expenses	Administrative Expenses (e.g. insurance, IT, copies, office supplies), Building Expenses (maintenance, repairs, trash and snow removal etc.).				

Each of the allocated expenses is allocated to the Programs based on a statistic. For this first round, our statistics were relatively crude. For example, we asked allocated staff to provide an estimate of the percentage of their time devoted to each of the programs. For committee and other line item expenses we allocated to the programs using Program direct expenses as an allocation statistic (in other words, the more direct expenses the program has the more overhead the program would absorb in the allocation).

Results: The results of our first Program budget are illustrated on the next page.

**2018 Program budget
based on 2018
Operational Budget -
Percent of Expenses**



In future iterations, many refinements will be made to this Program budget to make it more accurate and appropriate. For example:

- Hiring of an Assistant Minister might dramatically change the Program Budget picture for the Program categories to which that individual will be devoted.
- Allocation of overhead staff salaries could be made more accurate with the implementation of a time tracking system which would track staff hours based on program categories.
- Completion of the building remodel will provide us with new square footage figures which could be used to more accurately allocate building maintenance and repair costs – for example we might use a statistic based on the monthly building hours used by each program by major building area (sanctuary, RE space, community space, etc.).

Whole Souul Living

Our Whole Souul Living Theme for December is Salvation (in THIS Life). In truth, most of us need some salvation: from old habits and limitations, from creeping materialism, from a broken economy... The nation needs some salvation: from partisan politics, easy answers, and outright lies. The world needs some salvation...: from pollution, too many people, and senseless wars... You get the idea.

- What have been the saving events, experiences, or disciplines in your life?
- Who have been the saving people in your life or experience?
- When and how have you saved someone or something else?
- Is there a “Saving Grace” available to human beings? What is it?



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