



Loughshare

A Piece of Mike's Mind

by Rev. Mike Morran

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Typically, my annual reports have included acknowledgement and thanks of our many wonderful people for all of the amazing and faithful work they do at First Unitarian. This year, I'm going to do that in a different format than my annual report. This report will attempt to capture the high level themes, directions, and changes of the year just past and the one coming up.

Sometimes change is imposed by circumstances beyond our control, sometimes we work very hard to create it. This past year we have had both varieties at First Unitarian. Interesting times! Change can bring stress, uncertainty, and great opportunity.

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The Next Chapter

By Rev. Beth Chronister, Assistant Minister

As I look toward my final month at First Unitarian Society of Denver, I am filled with incredible gratitude for the time we have shared. Over the past two years, in relationship to you and the transformative ministries of FUSD, I have grown into my ministry. Being here has been an incredible joy, sprinkled with challenges, which I believe marks it as an authentic growth and learning experience. Thank you for being companions on the journey.

In my ordination back in April 2015, the poem "Seven of Pentacles" was read. In that poem, Marge Piercy writes,

*"Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses
Live a life you can endure: Make love that is loving.
Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in...
Live as if you liked yourself, and it may happen:
reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in."*

REMINDER!

We are sending Rev. Beth off in style. Join us on **Sunday June 19th**, after the service in the community room to wish her well on the next step in her incredible ministry!

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On the side of changes beyond our control, we will be saying reluctant good-byes to Rev. Beth at the end of June. She will be leaving to take up a full-time Assistant Ministry position with the University Unitarian Universalist Church in Seattle, a much larger congregation than First Unitarian. Rev. Beth has done excellent work with us and she will do excellent work wherever she goes. First Unitarian has also done excellent work with her; encouraging, clarifying, giving her room to find her voice and identity as a minister. Ordaining her! She will be greatly missed by us, and I will personally miss having a capable and energetic assistant.

Also leaving us is Lynette Stoyles, our Choir Director since last January. This coming August, we will be very excited to introduce the congregation to our next Choir Director, Brian Stone. Lastly on the side of changes beyond our control, we have said goodbye to three community members who have passed on since last year. Oluf Nielsen, Gia Bocciarelli, and Phyllis Dunlap, of blessed memory.

On the side of changes we have worked to create, the year has seen some changes in the Religious Exploration Program as Rev. Jamil has led us on a thorough assessment of our strengths, areas for growth, and future directions. In the next year we will be implementing a more family oriented program, beyond Sunday morning classes, equipping parents and whole families to grow their spirits and their faith. We will be working much harder to incorporate and coordinate social justice into the curriculum for children and youth, and create more and meaningful intergenerational opportunities for all of us. You should know that Rev. Jamil was hired as an Acting Director of Religious Exploration, not a permanent one. We (Rev. Jamil and FUSD) are currently discerning whether and how much longer he will stay with us.

In the music program, we had our second annual fall Revival, this year led by the amazing Daryl Walker. We brought many voices to the State Capitol for the tenth annual Standing on the Side of Love service, and Music Sunday was truly spectacular. Speaking of the music program, I'm pleased to announce that Lia Davis has been promoted to Music Director. This is a thoroughly deserved and somewhat overdue recognition of the profound gifts of music, love, and presence that Lia brings to First Unitarian Denver.

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In the past two years, we have woven real connections. We have kept reaching out and bringing in as we welcomed new people into our congregation and as we opened our hearts more fully to one another. There is a warmth that emanates on Sunday mornings as we come together again to get real, be seen, see others, be challenged, and try our hardest to be a loving community. Remember the dual fierceness of your love and the gentle, forgiveness of your warmth. There is a big year ahead at First Unitarian, one which will include risk, transformation, uncertainty, and undoubtedly, compromise. Such a year could be ripe for dis-ease or it could be the very circumstances of rebirth. Now, more than ever, make love that loving. Keep reaching out, keep bringing in. Weave real connections. Tip the scales to rebirth.

My last day preaching at First Unitarian will be June 19th and my final day at the church will be June 30th. I still have some time in Colorado before I move to say good bye to this beautiful state and my people here. In early August, I will start the drive to Seattle, visiting National Parks along the way and making a pilgrimage of the experience. Once I arrive in Seattle, I will be moving into temporary housing for the first 6 weeks to give myself time to find a house to rent with a good friend who recently relocated there to work at the Gates Foundation. I share this with you because we have woven real connection with one another and I know that you continue to hold me in care even as I begin a ministry elsewhere. You all have firmly lodged yourselves in my heart and I carry you with me as well into my next chapter of uncertainty/risk/rebirth.

"There is a warmth that emanates on Sunday mornings as we come together again to get real, be seen, see others, be challenged, and try our hardest to be a loving community."

Because we have loved one another, this next part is hard. When I leave at the end of June, I fully leave for a year. This means, following June 30th, I will not be visiting First Unitarian or be in contact with members for one full year. I am not going to disappear from social media, but I ask you to respect the year of no contact. This clear separation can feel unnatural or harsh on one hand, but on the other, this distance also creates space for grief, healing, letting go, and preparing to welcome in whoever will be your next Assistant Minister. This spaciousness allows me to more fully walk into my next ministry. I appreciate your understanding and support.

So, in this final month, I hope to see you! Now is the time to say whatever it is that needs to be said to one another and to express our gratitude for the time we've shared. I for one am deeply grateful to have been given the chance, as your Assistant Minister, to love this congregation into greater wholeness and vice versa.

Our Look at RE

By Rev. Jamil Scott, Director of Religious Exploration

This year of assessment in religious exploration has been fruitful and full of energy. Our curricula explored the Black Lives Matter movement and racial justice in the context of the existing RE classroom structure. We learned about identity, racism, tolerance and resistance to injustice. Our children and youth participated in fruitful faith-in-action learning experiences around homelessness, racism, and environmental justice. Our Middle and High School youth spent time in youth cons throughout the district, our 9th graders visited Hopi and Navajo sovereign lands, and many of our youth will participate in the MDD summer camps, Quest and Spirit Quest. Both Kindergarten/1st grade children and our High School youth participated in the Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education curriculum.

The RE Team and I reviewed a previous year surveys, the RE program throughout Eric Bliss' tenure, and conducted surveys of our parents and families that resulted in an assessment of our program. Generally, the program is healthy and thriving, the health of the program allows us the possibility to vision being a flagship program in RE for our district and denomination at-large. Consensus is that we would like more parent support in the form of classes and support groups, family pastoral care when needed, a strengthened justice-oriented focus in our program, outreach to the larger community, and further our efforts towards a fully experiential and embodied curriculum. The PREZI presentation of the assessment can be viewed at fusden.org under "children and families."

Many initiatives were initiated this year, including a new youth leadership model called the "Youth Fellows" program, FIAC direct participation and coordination of youth justice activities, revamping the website, curricula development coordination through technology, online registration and more. Many hands contributed to the health of this program, a program poised to innovate and lead UU religious education in the future. Our volunteers have been busy both doing assessment work and experimenting this year. We are very thankful for our program and we are excited to see what is created in the FUSD religious exploration program.

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Congregational Meeting Report and Follow Up

by Rev. Mike Morran and the Building Renovation Team

With much planning and forethought by many, First Unitarian held a congregational meeting last Sunday (5/22). The intention of the meeting was to, 1) share information about the building renovation plans as they currently stand, 2) share the results of the financial feasibility study and related funding plans for the project, and 3) seek formal permission from the congregation to continue along the anticipated trajectory of those plans.

At the end of the meeting the congregation voted by a wide margin to proceed. Ninety-five votes FOR, fifteen votes AGAINST, (86% in favor). There was at least a little confusion about exactly what was being voted upon. A few people apparently thought that this was the final vote to proceed with both the building and fundraising plans. This is not the case.

The vote on Sunday May 22nd:

- Authorizes the Building Renovations Team to continue planning the renovation as depicted on the plan presented at the meeting
- Authorizes the Capital Fundraising Team to begin fund raising for a projected \$2.6M project
- Requires the Board of Trustees to update the Congregation in September/October 2016 with the initial fundraising results and information regarding approvals from the Landmark Commission and State Historic Fund.
- Directs the Board of Trustees to develop policies and identify internal changes to create a property escrow reserve by June 30, 2017.

There are other steps in this process that will require specific approval of the congregation. If fundraising proceeds as we hope and expect we will be back to the congregation in the fall to approve a final project budget and for authorization to proceed with the renovation project. If the fund raising efforts between now and September/October do not support proceeding in accordance with the plan presented on Sunday in its entirety, this will be communicated at that time and alternatives explored. Towards the end of the meeting, one of our valued members shared some

REMINDER!

Have you been to a couple of services and wondered more about the roots of Unitarian Universalism? Have you been involved in a Core Circle and really gotten to know the congregation? Are you ready to embark on a journey of the mind, heart, and spirit? Then our "Finding Yourself at First Unitarian" is made for you. It is **Saturday September 17th at 9:00a**. Register with the office by email or phone (303-831-7113 x0).

2015-16 Board President Annual Report

by Chris Hahn, President

At our board retreat this year, Rev. Mike reminded us that the way we interact as a board has broad repercussions throughout the congregation. We incorporated this observation into our board covenant, and it served us well throughout the year:

How our Board works together influences the energy of the Congregation.

We commit to:

1. Communicate openly and transparently.
2. Seek right relations with colleagues and congregation.
3. Appreciate our volunteers and doers.
4. Support our committees and staff through our Board role.
5. Sustain momentum.
6. Focus on solutions.

Our main focus for the year was on the building renovation project and capital campaign. First Unitarian is truly blessed to have so many people willing to volunteer to support its vitality, and the building renovation project is a great example. The various renovation groups took on an ambitious schedule, and right now we have conceptual plans for a remodel in hand, and a capital campaign that is about to launch. Don't get too used to those chairs in the sanctuary, their days are numbered!

As a part of the capital campaign, we are in the middle of the first audit of our finances in recent memory. This first year of an audit is a tremendous undertaking for our staff and volunteers, but it has already made us even better stewards of our financial resources.

Unfortunately, our budgeting was affected by an accounting anomaly in the 2014-15 fiscal year, which caused us to over-estimate income by \$32K in our 2015-16 budget. Our investments did not have a particularly good year this year, either. Fortunately, as of March, income is \$4K ahead of expenses. We expect to end the year with a small deficit.

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One of the areas that Rev. Beth has focused on is Connections Ministry. In the past year they have organized 2nd Sunday Book Signings, New Member Dinners, New Member Welcome ceremonies, Finding Yourself at First Unitarian Classes, taking class attendees out to Sunday brunch, and smiley coffee mugs for the Community Room, among other things. Mary Hilken and Noelle Botti will be carrying Connections Ministry forward from here. This is a strong, enthusiastic, and welcoming group!

Another ministry where First Unitarian has been working for change is of course social justice. The Faith-In-Action Council has been wonderful and effective for its entire history at First Unitarian and this year has been no exception. We have hosted five rotations of Family Promise and welcomed a new Family Promise coordinator. Mardi Moore has taken over from Ann Weaver after five years of faithful service to this ministry. We have provided approximately 400 beds in the past year for homeless women to spend the night in safety and dignity within our walls. The Women's Homelessness Initiative also has a new Site Coordinator in Jamie Schwartz. The Mental Well-Being Initiative (formerly known as I-cubed) has held workshops, worship experiences, and more. The Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Project has done the same. Immigration Justice and the Sanctuary Coalition have been busy with our many partners and allies, lobbying, educating, and advocating for immigrant families and for Immigration reform. Although Arturo was finally able to go home late last summer, it is entirely possible that we will soon be offering sanctuary to another victim of outdated immigration policies and unjust deportation.

Not yet organized into a Congregational Project, a number of us have been working on and partnering with other organizations around racial justice. Kristen Psaki and Micki Boling have been facilitating a CORE circle to explore whiteness and white supremacy. We have formed an excellent working relationship with Black Lives Matter 5280 and Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), the Colorado Interfaith Alliance, Together Colorado, and recently with Shorter African Methodist Episcopal

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Church. On June 5th, we will be voting on what I deeply hope will be our next signature Congregational Project: Racial Justice and Ending White Supremacy.

Related to social justice, after learning that the pitch of our roof makes it unsuitable for solar panels, Dan Johnson found a solution. First Unitarian has bought shares in field of solar panels out near the airport. This investment will cost us approximately what we have been paying in electric bills for about the next fifteen years, and after that we will be living electrically off of the sun!

Without a doubt, the biggest change we have been working towards this year has been renovating this beautiful but dated and somewhat neglected old building. Shortly after passing the Long Range Plan in 2015, the Board created three teams to begin planning for this major endeavor. A Steering Committee, to oversee communications, collaboration, and coordinate the calendar. A Building Renovation Team, to select an architect, communicate our vision, and collaborate on architectural designs. And a Capital Fund Raising Team, to research and plan for how we will raise money to complete the project.

All three of these teams have been working hard, holding MANY meetings, and doing their best to keep everyone informed along the way. Very recently, the congregation voted to pursue Historical Landmark status for the building, and even more recently, after seeing the architect's initial drawings and financial feasibility study, the congregation voted overwhelmingly to continue along the path we've been charting.

Recognizing that the three-team structure that got us this far will not be effective or efficient as the project speeds up, the Steering Committee has disbanded and we are currently designing a different, more streamlined structure for making quick but accountable decisions.

In terms of numbers, our membership has remained consistent for about four years now, hovering between 365 and 400 souls. The average age of members has dropped slightly in the past two years as our elders have passed on and young

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adults make their home here. The children's program has also been holding steady between 110 and 130 registrations, and Sunday attendance continues to average about 300 people over the course of the year. The average pledge is slightly up and so is the completion of pledge payments. The number of pledging families is holding steady. All of which means that our income is also holding steady, growing just enough to cover increases in health insurance for staff members and increasing utility costs. All in all, despite not being able to replace Rev. Beth, we are in very good shape! Thank you! For all that you do and all that you give!

The next year at First Unitarian will be dominated by the Building Renovation Project, but that's not nearly all that will be going on. I'm very excited about First Unitarian becoming much more deeply involved in Racial Justice through a new Congregational Project. I'm a little worried about how I'm going to keep myself balanced and sane without an assistant. Whoever you are reading this, I will need your help! I'm looking forward to partnering with Religious Exploration as we develop a more family-based ministry model. I'm also very excited about some still-evolving plans for the music program.

One thing I know for sure, this remains a very strong and vital congregation, primarily because of the strength and the bonds among our amazing people. That means all of us, all the people whose shoulders we stand on, all the people who are currently here, and all the people who have yet to come inside. I am, and we are, stronger together.

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this will be communicated at that time and alternatives explored.

Towards the end of the meeting, one of our valued members shared some deep concerns about the project, especially the architectural plans and associated costs. These were and are legitimate issues. We realize there was not time at last Sunday's meeting for the congregation to digest and adequately discuss those concerns, nor was there adequate time for the Building Renovation Team that has been working with the architect to adequately respond or share their thinking. We are sorry this may have left some people feeling their ideas or concerns were not valued. We recognize a congregational meeting is a challenging forum for these types of discussions.

Chris Hahn (Board President), Kathy Cranmer (Chair of Building Renovation Team), Mark Skrotzki (Chair of Capital Fundraising Team) and Rev. Mike Morran would like the congregation to know that we are deeply aware that additional processes for discussing concerns, processing information, and obtaining feedback are needed for the health of the community and the health of the project. The four of us and the Board of Trustees will be consulting with other leadership in the congregation as soon as possible to create further opportunities for sharing, discussion, and discernment regarding the overall project, including the concerns raised at last Sunday's meeting.

Please stay tuned and stay involved.

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All of this made our 2016-17 budgeting very challenging. For fiscal and logistical reasons, we made the difficult choice to not fund the part-time assistant minister position that Rev. Beth is vacating in June.

The board pondered the congregation's familiar situation of having larger aspirations than its budget, and decided to launch a Prosperity Strategy Team. This team's charge includes raising \$30K above our budget next year, and \$90K above our current budget for the year after that. This income will come from sources outside of annual pledges. These funds will go towards funding a full-time assistant minister and our building escrow fund. This team is counting on the energy and ingenuity of you (yes, you dear reader) to meet these goals, so please help out our Prosperity Strategy Team when they need it.

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Did you know First Unitarian went solar this year? In November, thanks to generous individuals in the congregation, funds from our green sanctuary fund, and a \$127K loan, we purchased community solar panels from the Clean Energy Collective. With the current economics of solar power, the savings on our energy bills combined with the solar credit income we receive will offset our loan payments. This made our decision budget-neutral in the short term. In the long term, it will be a \$13K boost to our annual budget when we pay off the loan on the solar panels in 2030.

My fellow church leadership nerds will know that for many years, we talked about how important it was for First Unitarian to move from a “pastoral model” to a “program model” for congregational leadership. We have arrived! Our congregational decision making is widely distributed through the various administrative and programming committees. I often find myself thanking a group that got “in the weeds” to work through an issue before the board had any idea it existed. If you have served on one of these committees, thank you! Without you, there would be no First Unitarian.

Thanks also to our amazing board of trustees: Furman Brown, Jeanne Abrams, Jim Stephens, Ellen Cahill, Stu Ferguson, Lars Parkin, and Zach Robertson. Thanks to Kelly Becker and Doug Fiero who will be joining the board next year. Thank you Peggy Streit and Ginger Beach for being an invaluable team of Treasurers. Thanks to Peggy Ulrich-Nims for outstanding service as our board secretary.

It truly is an honor and a privilege to serve as your President of the Board and I am looking forward to our adventures together in the upcoming year.

Yours in fellowship,

Chris Hahn

Whole Souul Living

by Rev. Mike Morran

The Whole Souul Living Theme for June is Truth. The 4th Principle of Unitarian Universalism is: “A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” Certainly there is a category of empirical truth to the physical world. Just as certainly there is a category of more subjective truth that will vary from person to person. Still, in the Unitarian Universalist tradition, we take the question of religious truth very seriously. It was the search for truth and a more authentic religious experience that led us to break away from more traditional Christianity. This month, let us reflect individually and communally on some of the following:

- What distinguishes religious/spiritual truth from more (so-called) rational truth? Is there such a thing as religious/spiritual “truth?”
- Nadine Gordimer wrote: “The truth isn't always beauty, but the hunger for it is.” Is this true? Do you experience your own hunger as beautiful? Tell a story about this.
- What do you accept as true, even though you might not be able to prove it?
- Tell a story of pursuing a responsible search for truth and meaning. What are you searching for in your life right now?
- What deeper truths, and what sense of meaning is needed by the world?
- What, in our larger culture, encourages a search for truth and meaning? What works against that search? How do you experience encouragement or discouragement in your own life?
- What can we do as people or a community to more effectively support this principle?