



# Plovershare

## A Piece of Mike's Mind

*by Rev. Mike Morran*

You almost wouldn't believe the amount of work, time, meetings, conversations, and planning that has been going on at First Unitarian over the past eight months. Since the last congregational meeting in June of 2015 when it was approved to move forward towards a Building Renovation Project, we have created a Steering Committee, a Capital Funds Team, and a Building Renovation Team. We have hired an architect, a financial consultant, and professional auditor. We held small group meetings all across the city to share information and ask for feedback.

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## In Our Community

*By Rev. Beth Chronister, Assistant Minister*

My life story is a story about community. Some stories are both beautiful and complex like the story of my childhood religious community, its strengths and disappointments. Some stories feature lots of conflict like the time I was studying social work and went to the US/Mexico border with a group of anarchists for an immersion trip. Some stories are tender, like the instant community created at a summer camp or the time in college when the members of a cooperative came together to support a roommate after the death of her father. Other stories continue to unfold like the story of my two years living in Paraguay where I first learned what interdependent, intergenerational community might feel like. Honestly, without the stories of community, my life story would not be much a story at all.

Please see *Community* on page 3

***A Piece of Mike's Mind from page 1***

We chose a name for the project, "Step up to our legacy, embrace our future." We conducted a professional financial feasibility study. We voted overwhelmingly to seek a Historic Designation for our building. We have discussed and shared many plans, cost estimates, decision points, staffing needs, and much, much more.

On May 22nd, we will have another congregational meeting to share what we have learned and where things stand. We will share some of the decisions already made, and some that need to be made very soon. We will be seeking formal permission from the community to continue along the path we have started.

In the meantime, there will be a table in the Community Room every Sunday between now and then with detailed information about the project, the funding, and the future. Knowledgeable people will be on hand to walk you through some of the details that are less than obvious. Please stop by and talk to them. Learn what we've been thinking, ask your questions, give your feedback, be engaged. This is a very big deal for 1st Unitarian!

Along these lines, many people have asked me for my own take on the project which I am happy to do. The very short answer is that; It's a BIG project for us, parts of it really NEED to happen, and we can do it!

See you in church!

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*"BIG plans are afoot and it's time to come together. Here in March and over the next several months, First Unitarian Denver has some very large decisions to make."*

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## New Member Book Signing

### by The Connections Ministry

Are you ready to take the plunge? That is, the plunge into becoming a formal member of this spiritual community. On the second Sunday of every month, Rev. Mike Morran, Rev. Beth Chronister and members of the Connections Ministry will be available in the Minister's office immediately following the first service to hold a brief ceremony and Membership Book signing. Please bring a fully completed new member profile, pledge form and the fire of your commitment and you will be warmly welcomed into this faith community. To obtain the necessary paper work in advance, please email Glenn at [office@fusden.org](mailto:office@fusden.org)

***Community from page 1***

If you were to tell the story of your life through the communities you have been within,

Which ones would be central in the story?

What imprint have these communities left on your life?

What has being in community taught you about being human?

The concept Ubuntu originated in South Africa. Loosely translated, Ubuntu means “I am because we are” or “people are not people without people.” It is a word that has become a political ideology in various nations in southern Africa as they walk the hard road to recreate themselves after long histories of European colonialism, domination, and political corruption. The word Ubuntu was introduced into the Western imagination through the writings of Desmond Tutu. In his memoir, “No Future Without Forgiveness”, Tutu writes, “Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, ‘Yu, u nobunto’; ‘Hey so-and-so has ubuntu.’ Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, ‘My humanity is inextricably bound up in yours.’”

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*“Ubuntu means “I am because we are” or “people are not people without people..”*

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The concept of Ubuntu feels so far from the dominant narratives in the United States. The fiction of individualism has made for a very lonely and isolated existence for many. We are told we should be able to make it on our own. The “self-made man” story or the popular “bootstraps” tale says “I am because I made myself this way.” And yet, in reflecting on your own life story, what would be missing if you had not been within community? What pieces of yourself would have not developed outside of relationship to others? What group experiences have fundamentally made you... you?

Community is the access point of the wise truth that says, “I am because we are.” The experience of this truth is not accessible by just showing up and living at the surface of a community or breezing by relationships to others. However, this truth might be discovered over time... when we pause, go deeper, and actively engage with one another on this journey toward becoming more human, more whole, together. May this be our shared story.

*P.S. My final day at First Unitarian will be June 30th before I move to Seattle in August to start my ministry at University Unitarian Church. I hope to see you before I leave!*

## How Are the Children?

*By Rev. Jamil Scott, Director of Religious Exploration*

As we conclude our RE programming for the Spring and prepare for our Coming-of-Age and High School Bridging service on May 15th, I am contemplating the meaning of community and especially its role in the lives of our children and youth. I am reminded of the Kenyan and Tanzanian Masai Warrior greeting “And, how are the children?” That a community’s first concern would be the wellbeing of their children, so much so, that it acknowledges every encounter with this greeting, highlights the role of the community in raising a child for these persons. The greeting, “And, how are the children?” is used irrespective of a person’s parental status, it is understood that the children are the primary concern of every member of the community.

Sunday, May 15th, some of our youth will be celebrating their journey through religious exploration and their growth under the guidance of the First Unitarian community. The closest equivalent we have to this service both in the sense of UU Theology and structure of the service is the Jewish Bar and Bat Mitzvah. The Bar Mitzvah is a highlight in the Jewish liturgical year, family members travel far and wide to hear their relative utter a few lines from the Torah and receive special gifts that symbolize their growth into the community. Typically, all of the members of the Synagogue join the celebration and ritual of a youth growing into the community. In a conversation, a Jewish friend of mine was speaking with such enthusiasm to attend a Bar Mitzvah at a local Synagogue for a child that he barely knew. For him, the continuation of the lineage Judaism with bright and promising youth was a source of renewal of his hope and faith.

We have eight coming-of-age youth and three High School graduates who will be celebrating their passage into the youth and adult factions of our community. In actuality this celebration is not about these youth, but is a time of renewal and hope for the future of our Unitarian Universalist faith. This celebration is an acknowledgement of the importance of religious education, intergenerational worship, and the presence of youth in all aspects of church life. This month our community, including our children, youth, young adults, adults, and elders are inspired with hope in the continuation of Unitarian Universalism in the lives of these young people, who are all of our children. Please join us at 11:00a on Sunday, May 15 to have your faith and hope renewed, there will be an all-church picnic in Cheesman park afterwards. And, how are the children? The children are well!

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*“The greeting, “And, how are the children?” is used irrespective of a person’s parental status, it is understood that the children are the primary concern of every member of the community.”*

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## The Results Are In!

### *by Capital Campaign Steering Committee*

This month a Financial Feasibility Study on our \$2.6m building plan was conducted by Barry Finkelstein, an experienced fundraising consultant who has worked with many UU churches preparing for capital campaigns. The results will assist First Unitarian's Capital Fundraising Team (CFT) in planning for our campaign. On Monday, April 18th we heard the study report. The highlight came on the final page of the study: "You Can Do This!" Which doesn't mean our path will be straight, quick or easy. In brief:

- Mr. Finkelstein interviewed 70 people from 49 households, representing 22% of the congregation and 53% of our total annual pledges. These households committed \$1.2m toward the expected \$2.6m project. This support represents 5.7 times their annual giving. Of this group, 33 indicated they will give \$10K or more; 16 will give \$25K or more; 4 committed \$100K. Based on this level of support, he projected that we could support a project of \$1.6m - \$2m.
- The Essential Gifts Chart used in the study relies on top gifts of \$500K, \$250K, and \$150K which were not confirmed in the study. Mr. Finkelstein suggests that we continue to search for sources for these top gifts and an additional 22 major gifts of \$10K or more.
- Mr. Finkelstein noted that respondents had not heard what commitment others were making, and some didn't realize that gifts can be paid over three years. He also noted that his projection doesn't take into account potential grants that may support the project. He encouraged us to proceed with more intensive prospect review and to initiate the early, quiet phase of the campaign to uncover our real fundraising potential. He proposed some strategies to help us run an "excellent campaign".
- There is broad support for the proposed project. Respondents prioritized infrastructure and critical maintenance, interior upgrades, a more welcoming entrance, and RE classrooms. They were enthusiastic, even eloquent, about how the plan supports our shared vision, which surprised the consultant given a project its high saturation with deferred maintenance.

#### 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 May 21st at 9:00a**. Register with the office by email or phone (303-831-7113 x0).

## Family Promise

*by Mardi Moore, Family Promise Coordinator*

We are right in the middle of hosting a big group of Family Promise guests this week! We have a single dad with three adorable little boys, a lovely couple with two charming teenage girls, a mom with her teenage son, and a mom with her two daughters and one son. One parent found work this week! One of the teenagers sang in a school concert last night! Everyone is pitching in and helping each other. Many thanks to all the many volunteers that make this happen.

- We will need volunteers to launder sheets and towels when this rotation ends. Look for the big plastic garbage bags full of linens in the Community Room after each service on May 1st. Instructions are in the bag.
- Here are some opportunities to connect with staff and members of the other congregations that make up our greater Family Promise community serving the whole Metro Denver area.
- Friday, June 3 (6:00p-8:00p) Community Open House at the Family Promise Day Site. 419Lipan, Denver. Tour the day site, mingle, & view a gallery of photos captured by the families we serve. 303.675.0713 to RSVP <http://www.familypromiseofgreaterdenver.org/community-open-house/>
- Saturday, June 11 (10:00-11:30a) Coffee Talk for Family Promise Volunteers. Mingle with other volunteers, chat about the different ways you support Family Promise at your congregations and get to know each other better. 419 Lipan, Denver. 303.675.0713 to RSVP
- Saturday, July 23 (5:00p-7:00p) Summer Garden Party. Day Site, 419 Lipan, Denver. Enjoy food and fun as we celebrate the summer season in the Family Promise urban vegetable garden. 303.675.0713 to RSVP
- Saturday, September 17 (8:30a-2:00p) DENVER BED RACE TO END HOMELESSNESS! Teams of volunteers, family members, colleagues and friends build mock beds to race down a city street to support families in need! The beds symbolize the emergency shelter that Family Promise provides to more than 50,000 people each year. Race will be run at Conservatory Green Park and Plaza, Denver. Registration cut off is September 1st. For more information or to register, contact John Chambers at [jchambers@familypromiseofgreaterdenver.org](mailto:jchambers@familypromiseofgreaterdenver.org).

If you have any questions about Family Promise at First Unitarian and how to get involved, contact Mardi Moore [mardimoore@forethought.net](mailto:mardimoore@forethought.net)

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### A message from Abundance:

*"Giving connects two people, the giver and the receiver, and this connection gives birth to a new sense of belonging."*

–Deepak Chopra.

This year, find belonging through giving. Give and connect to your community at First Unitarian!

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## May is Mental Health Month

*by Karen Ray*

Friends, co-workers, significant others, a family member - anyone can be struggling with mental health conditions. All too often, they are struggling in silence, alone, and without support.

The month of May is Mental Health Month - a special opportunity to spread awareness and come together to provide support and strength to the 1 in 5 people affected by mental illness.

Our Mental Well-Being Initiative is working hard to help ILLUMINATE INVISIBLE INJUSTICE (I<sup>3</sup>) experienced by people struggling with addictions, trauma, and mental health issues. We ask you to join us in recognizing the facts. Each year millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental health condition. We will only make progress if we open our hearts and our minds and see people as people, not their conditions. We envision First Unitarian as a welcoming, compassionate and caring community that offers a safe place for people who just need a soft place to land; A Caring Congregation. What can you do?

- Check in with us during coffee time between service - look for GREEN (see green/think mental health). We are forming a team for the NAMI (National Alliance of Mental Illness) walk to help raise awareness, reduce stigma, and fund programs.
- We also encourage you to check out an excellent article that was aired on Colorado Public Radio, Sunday, April 24. You can access it by going to [npr.org/health-shots](http://npr.org/health-shots). It is the story of a mother and her son who were dealing with an episode just prior to the Newtown tragedy. This poignant story brings to light the frustrations and difficulties experienced by a family trying to figure out "what is wrong?" and "what can I do?" It is ultimately a story of hope.
- Governor Hickenlooper will be signing a proclamation of Mental Health Month on Monday, May 2 at noon. The ceremony will take place on the first floor, west foyer of the State Capitol building.

We believe that it is important to address these issues all year round, but highlighting the issues during May provides a time for people to come together and display the passion and strength of those working to improve the lives of all Americans whose lives are affected by mental health conditions. 1 in 5 Americans are affected by mental health conditions in their lifetime, though EVERY AMERICAN is affected or impacted. We hope you become involved in our activities in the next church year as we elevate First Unitarian to A Mental Well Being Caring Congregation.



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# Western Unitarian Universalist Life Festival

*by Katherine Hahn*

For many years my family and I have attended Western Unitarian Universalist Life Festival, or WUULF, at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, New Mexico. Every year I form new friendships and deepen old ones. Small group workshops, sing-alongs and daily morning worship are just some of the ways I connect with a larger circle of friends among UUs from many states. I also enjoy chaperoning as my kids participate in the children's program. It's so much fun to witness kids of all ages playing, hiking and learning together in this intergenerational camp. The power of the rocks, vistas and landscapes feed my soul—it's like spending a week in a Georgia O'Keeffe painting! Each year I come away with a deeper understanding of what it means to me to be a Unitarian Universalist and a spiritual person. I encourage you to visit [www.wuulf.org](http://www.wuulf.org) to view the catalog for the WUULF 2016 family camp that takes place June 20-26 at Ghost Ranch. Registration is open until May 1st or until camp fills.



## **Results from Page 5**

- Some interviewees expressed concerns about sustaining annual funding throughout a capital campaign, raised some issues with plan details, and some concern that the scope is not ambitious enough. There were also concerns about whether we can manage the size and scope of the project, the impact of historic landmark designation, and disruption during construction. Others were eager for more details in the plan.

Finkelstein's PowerPoint presentation with recommendations about how we might proceed as well as an executive summary prepared by the CFT can both be found on the First Unitarian website at <http://fusden.org/renovation-project>.

## What Happens Following the Financial Feasibility Study?

The larger project team (SC, BRT, and CFT) met with representatives of the Board, Finance Council, Ministers and Staff on April 23<sup>rd</sup> to determine how to proceed given encouraging and positive (though not definitive) results from the feasibility study.

The group determined that work would proceed along two tracks of activity.

- The BRT, whose work to date has resulted in a preliminary project plan with cost estimates will continue to work with the architect to make changes in response to congregational comments and produce displays to help us better visualize key aspects of the design.
- Second, as Mr. Finkelstein recommended, the CFT will now conduct an in-depth prospect review, draft the Case for Support, and quickly undertake the initial quiet phase solicitation which reaches out to the inner circle of organizational leadership, project volunteers and other potential top donors. The CFT continues to pursue historic designation and associated funds, as approved by the congregation on March 20.

The group decided not to proceed with construction plans and city permits until the fall 2016, allowing the CFT to provide a more complete picture of our funding potential. The Board will check in with the Congregation at a May 22, 11:00a meeting, asking support to continue pursuing this plan and the related capital campaign.

Report prepared by Richard Erickson and Sharon Pressly-Fiero

## From The Board of Trustees

*by Chris Hahn, President*

In case you missed it, here is what I shared with the congregation on Sunday, April 17th:

Good morning. My name is Chris Hahn and it is my pleasure and privilege to serve as the president of your board of trustees this year.

My girlfriend Katherine Page and I started coming here about 19 years ago. If you had told my 28-year-old self then that I would be standing here speaking to you as president of the board, I would have called you crazy.

But things happen. Since then Katherine and I were married right here, and we have seen quite a few other changes.

As a congregation, we always have large aspirations. I can remember when we aspired to having a full time director of religious education for our families. I also remember when we aspired to having an elevator to make our building accessible. Just last year we aspired to keep a man from being deported away from his family. All of these things we have achieved, and many, many more.

We realized one of our aspirations when in June of 2013, we passed a congregational resolution to hire an assistant minister for two years, using money from savings if necessary. This was a bold and visionary experiment. In August of 2014, Beth Chronister started as our half-time assistant minister. There is broad agreement that the experiment has been an unqualified success. And there is nothing half-time about her amazing impact on the congregation.

Now, with Beth moving on to a full-time dream job in Seattle in July, the board is coincidentally facing a bit of a budget challenge. These numbers are not final, but at our last Finance Council meeting, we were discussing a \$593K budget with a \$42K shortfall. I can tell you some of the story that got us to this point, but the accounting is not all that interesting. Ask me after the service.

To help close this budget gap, the board is proposing that we allow the assistant minister position to remain vacant for a year. This would allow us a year to reflect on our 2 years with Reverend Beth: what we have learned, how we have grown, and envision what we would like to see from our next assistant minister.

**Board from the previous page**

Next year we would also like to start addressing another systemic issue in our finances - that our budget is overly dependent on pledging members. In the long range plan that we approved overwhelmingly in December of 2014, on page 28 it recommends that we:

“Develop more alternative fundraising schemas sufficient to generate a 40% increase in our annual budget without a correspondingly high increase in pledges.”

The board has some innovative solutions to start us on this path. However, seeing the income from these solutions will take time and is dependent on all of our can-do volunteerism to make them happen.

Our vision is that by June of 2017, we will have the financial ability to confidently make the assistant minister position full-time and have made our budget less reliant on our generous pledging membership.

I want to give you another data point from our finance council meeting: for this fiscal year, as of February, our income is ahead of our expenses by \$17K. A lot can change in the last 4 months of the fiscal year, but this is promising news. Also, we are in the middle of conducting our first financial audit in recent memory. Overall, our finances are strong and we want to keep them that way so that we can continue serving our ambitious mission and vision.

I will be available after the service and would love to nerd out with you about the numbers and any ideas you may have. We also will be having budget forums May 8 and 15th. Look in FirstAnnounce for more details.

In closing, I want to take this opportunity to thank each of you for your presence this morning, and for your overwhelming generosity to this congregation that is so precious to us in so many ways. Thank you.

## Whole Souul Living

*by Rev. Mike Morran*

Community is our Whole Souul Living Theme for May. In a wonderful allegory, Rev. Barbara Pescan wrote: One of the old ones stood up into the morning light and spoke to those who had come back to the river: "Now we have come again to this place; it is a good thing. My life apart from you is not as strong. Yes, I have danced and I have told the stories at my own fire and I have sung to all the six directions. But when I am with you, my friends, I know better who it is in me that sings." This month, you are encouraged to reflect deeply on Community; your own longing for community, the joys and the difficulties of community. Within this community, please find opportunities to share with each other your reflections on the following questions.

- How do we want to be in community?
- How do we want others to be?
- What behavior or assumptions foster a sense of community?
- Relate an experience of being in community.
- Relate an experience of being excluded from community.
- What do you need to know about me; and what do I need to know about you?

## Sundays in May

May marks the beginning of summer in the worship life of First Unitarian. This month with a Marathon and a Congregational Meeting on the calendar, we've included the service dates and times.

- **May 1st** – two services, **9:15a and 11:00a**
- **May 8th** - two services, **9:15a and 11:00a** – Mother's Day
- **May 15th** – One service, **11:00a** – The Colfax Marathon should be over in our neighborhood and the streets clear.
- **May 22<sup>nd</sup>** – One Service, **9:15a** – This will be the regular service time until InGathering (Sunday, September 11<sup>th</sup>).
- **May 22<sup>nd</sup>** – Congregational Meeting, **11:00a**
- **May 29<sup>th</sup>** – One Service, **9:15a**