



June  
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# Ploughshare

## ***A Piece of Mike's Annual Mind***

***by Rev. Mike Morran***

This report comes in the middle of an international pandemic, and for the first time that I am aware of, no services or gatherings have been held at First Unitarian Denver for two consecutive months. Like so many organizations and communities, we are in a time of adaptation and even reinvention as the world changes the details of our lives and the mediums through which we communicate.

In addition to online Sunday Services, every single one of our meetings, (staff, board, finance, committees, CORE Circles, etc.) have gone online. At the end of this month, for the first time ever, we will attempt the entire annual business meeting, agenda, presentations, and congregational voting, online. Our learning curve has been steep!

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## ***Breaking Up with Social Media***

***by Erin Kenworthy, DRE***

*Or trying to. Maybe considering it. Someday.*

Hi. My name is Erin, and I have a problem. I'm addicted to social media. At first, it was the bulletin boards of AOL, then, sharing songs over a shared network. Then it grew to having a profile on Myspace, broadcasting my love of Broadway to anyone who cared. And then, I moved on to Facebook. Oh, I've tried twitter and Instagram, but... they've never stuck with me the way Facebook has.

Oh Facebook, land of opinions, relative anonymity, connection with that kid who ate paste in my third-grade class. It is so hard to quit you.

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This Annual Report will outline a few of the most important happenings, initiatives, and adaptations at First Unitarian Denver in the past twelve months.

Sadly, we note the passing this past year of five precious souls whose lives were a gift to this world and especially our community. Of blessed memory are Carolyn John, Betty Jo Armstead, Erin Colcannon, Wayne Knox and Dr. Gwendolyn Thomas. May they rest in peace and power.

We began the year with five main initiatives in addition to all our usual programming and activities.

1. We intended to switch from the all-year-round fund-raising model (essentially 12 mini-campaigns) which we have been using for the past eight years, to a single, focused campaign for the whole congregation. Karen Derrick-Davis and the new Stewardship Council (formerly Abundance) were largely responsible for making this happen. It was a LOT of work!
2. We formed a Covenant Task Force to gather information from the congregation about current values and relational priorities, and from that information draft a new Congregational Covenant to be voted upon and hopefully adopted. This team did a splendid job(!), modelling some of the finest, most civil, loving, and competent work I've seen. The final draft has been sent to the board to decide how and when it will be brought to the congregation for a final vote.
3. We formed a FUSE (First Unitarians Seeking Engagement) Task Force to explore how we might better engage and include people during their first couple years of membership. This enthusiastic group has reached out to and met with (I believe) all of our most recent members for some memorable conversations and connections. The FUSE Task Force was considering next steps when interrupted by the pandemic, and hopefully will pick up their work in the near future.
4. We hosted a ministerial internship for Jen Simon, soon to be a graduate of the Iliff School of Theology. This has been a hugely positive experience for the congregation and for Jen. She has led worship six times, participated in almost every Sunday service, taught classes, led groups, attended innumerable meetings, provided pastoral care, learned how to read and understand church budgets (among other things), taught us some new ways to think about white supremacy and anti-racism, and generally made herself a very welcome addition to the community. (Rumor has it she has become rather fond of us as well!) We wish her the best as she continues her journey toward professional ministry in Unitarian Universalism. Huge thanks to the Intern Committee for all their work this year.
5. We funded a much-needed overhaul of our website. Glenn Barrows deserves thanks and credit for seeing this project through.

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Other initiatives were the SoUUI Stage production of Rear View Mirror, a huge success and great fun, the Capitol Hill Concert Series, and this year's annual auction. Covid has temporarily delayed completing the concert series and the auction.

In social justice news, the Women's Homelessness Initiative has been suspended in this time of social distancing. The need hasn't gone away, but the decision to suspend operations was made in the interests of health and safety for the women and for the volunteers. Family Promise on the other hand continues, though the agency is using hotel rooms for housing instead of church buildings. Our team has transitioned from providing direct services to providing funding to keep those families fed and housed.

Our Racial Justice Group (until Covid 19) remained busy holding forums, speakers, pot-lucks, trainings, book discussions, Sunday Services, consulting with the Covenant Task Force, and more. Julie Meyers and Peggy Ulrich-Nims have been leading this effort at FUSD for four years now! Patrick Whorton and Steve Brainerd will be taking over as co-chairs of our ongoing efforts and education in July.

As noted in a recent newsletter column, although we continue to offer sanctuary to Jeanette Vizguerra, the entire landscape of Immigration Justice work as changed in the past few years. To make a long and complex story very short, this is largely due to the current administration in Washington, but the result locally has been that virtually all of our former partners and allies have pulled back from supporting Sanctuary as a strategy. We are largely on our own now. In addition, changes, moves, and other priorities has left our own Sanctuary team small and struggling. This in turn has left Jeanette feeling unsupported by the church.

To be very blunt, if we are going to continue offering Sanctuary, we are going to have to rebuild a flexible First Unitarian team of people to make it work. It is the right thing to do. Please contact me if you have questions, concerns, or ideas.

Financially, while you will receive a complete reporting at the congregational meeting, there are a few, high-level things I feel should be shared here as well. You might remember that we began the current fiscal year with a projected deficit of over forty thousand dollars. The good news is that through frugal spending, careful management and the generosity of our members and friends, we are on target to finish this fiscal year in the black instead of in a deficit! In addition, due to the follow-through of our donors and a recent stock donation, we have paid off the mortgage from the renovation! First Unitarian is once again debt-free! The entire 2.6 million dollar project is now paid for! Woooohooo and congratulations!

Sometime when we are gathering in person again, we'll have a burn-the-mortgage party.

In terms of next year's budget, all plans and projections are complicated by the uncertainties of the global pandemic. The good news is that for the time being we are solvent and anticipate being able to continue being the best church we can be, even as we learn new ways to live our mission and vision.

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This puts us WAY ahead of many congregations who are cutting staff, closing programs, and even permanently shuttering their doors right now. The bad news is that we are not able to provide the raises some of our amazing staff richly deserve. At least not right now. Huge thanks go to Laurie Duncan and Karl Jonietz for all their work as our Assistant Treasurer and Treasurer. Huge thanks to our extraordinary Finance Council, David Keller, Helen Berkman, Sally Madsen, and Mary Sullivan. Church finances are in excellent hands!

This report could not be complete without high praise and hallelujahs for Mary Sullivan as our board president. Mary's leadership, care, thoughtfulness, and thoroughness has been truly exceptional in a long line of exceptional volunteer leaders at First Unitarian. She's even willing to serve for another year! Please take any opportunity available to thank her for all her love and work.

On that note, special thanks to your wonderful board of trustees: Mary Sullivan, Angeles Ortega, Jillian Gleason, Barry Osborne, Tim Robertson, Lynn Palma, and Melany Deem. Peggy Ulrich-Nims serves as Board Secretary. These people work beautifully together, asking hard questions, practicing great respect, caring for each other, taking very seriously their responsibilities and the congregation they have chosen to serve. We are blessed by their love.

Lastly, as always, I am profoundly indebted to our magnificent staff: Glenn Barrows, Erin Kenworthy, Lia Davis, Brian Stone, Karen Derrick-Davis, Brenda Bruno, Patrick Phillips, Matt Davis, Erica Trisler, and Lena McCain. Even though Patrick Phillips and Erica Trisler decided to end their employment with us in the past few months, I am grateful for their time and their service with us.

Given all the current uncertainties, it is a little premature to venture about priorities and initiatives for next year. The board will be discussing this in detail over the summer. One thing I feel fairly confident in predicting is reinventing and rejuvenating CORE Circles, taking our online presence and offerings much more seriously, and celebrating the 150th anniversary of First Unitarian Denver. Beyond that, I think our next chapter is still unwritten, but am confident we will compose it together.

In Love and Faith,  
Mike Morran

## *Breaking from page 1*

Quite literally, they make it close to impossible to shut down your accounts (which I've never tried, because I am addicted to social media in a way that horrifies me, but does not deter me.) My own Facebook journey started out as reconnecting with distant friends and family, sharing cat videos, and pictures of food. Then it became a place for sharing ideas and dialogue about social issues. And then, well, that paste eating kid and my Aunt have clearly developed some very different opinions on the topic I am discussing, and Facebook seems like the best place to engage, argue, and ultimately end the tepid relationship on a sour note.

Except that it is not. It is not a great platform for creating positive social discussion or change. I learned that early on when I engaged in a rough discussion with another First Unitarian member on the value of voting in 2012. We got into the weeds around social contract theory, anarchy, and then perceived personal attacks. We then had to meet in person to have coffee and sort out the mess we both had made in order to maintain the relationship. We leaned into the covenant provided to us through our connection at First Unitarian. Facebook is not a covenantal community on its own.

Recent events (The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and other black civilians, protests and police brutality, Covid and climate change deniers, and leaders lacking basic human compassion) have once again lured me into the comments sections on friends and acquaintances Facebook pages. I'm more selective now about when and why I chime in. No significant learning occurs without significant relationship, and even then, it's not a guarantee. Facebook is the perfect place to practice performative allyship, build up a false front that can inoculate you from the painful parts of authentic relationship, and easy disengagement when the going gets tough. It is so tempting to drop knowledge on a stranger and then disappear back into the relative comfort of your own echo chamber for validation. I've recently succumbed.

Covenantal community, the sort that we aspire to build and experience at First Unitarian, is where our significant learning can occur. We can hold one another accountable to our agreements, which provides the opportunity for authentic relationships where significant learning and growth can occur. Again, it's not a guarantee, and disengagement when the going gets tough is as easy as not showing up. When we bring our whole selves to the community in a spirit of both give and receive, when we drop the performative in favor of the formative, we create space for powerful, transformative stuff to happen.

Humans are social beings. We crave connection and community. Facebook shines as a way to connect with friends, but it is not a community, and certainly not a covenantal one. The pandemic has shifted our access to our beloved communities. Schools, workplaces, churches, and other community spaces are closed to in-person gatherings. The real, physical aspect of showing up for each other has been traded for digital togetherness (not an upgrade, in my opinion), right next door to social media.

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It can be easy then, to conflate beloved community with social media. And if that is a challenge for adults with fully formed frontal cortex's, imagine the confusion of a child or adolescent who is encountering the community chat box for the first time, as their brain continues to mature.

There can be connective and authentic online communities. I've heard from people I trust (Lena McCain, our youth coordinator is one of those voices) that it is possible, though creating them is not my expertise and rarely my lived experience. I grew up in an analog world and adapted to the digital world that my own children were born into. Social media arrived on the scene after my brain reached maturity. Young adults and adolescents have moved on past Facebook and into Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat (and probably things I don't even know about.) for connection. Agreements, or the lack thereof, can make all the difference in how a community functions together. We've spent significant time, energy, and resources this year revisiting our covenant at First Unitarian. There is a draft, there will be discussion, and there will be a vote on adopting the language as our covenant. I'm excited by this work, and by the ways we've shown up for one another in this difficult time of fear, illness, and injustice. I'm optimistic about our communal strength, borne of our agreements, to build a new normal in the wake of unrest and disruption. Let us practice covenant together online and in person when it is safe to do so, in the hopes that compassionate agreements are established in the wider national community.

## *Transforming Impossible into Possible*

by Jen Simon, Ministerial Intern

Hi there, First Unitarian.

So... Until recently, I had planned this, my last Ploughshare article, to be, if not a completely fluffy, sentimental and affectionate goodbye, at least a bit lighter... a bit airier... And make no mistake - I will miss you all greatly, and I hope you know that of course I bear you a great deal of affection. But these are exceptional times, and I think they call for a different message.

Now, since the beginning of this strange new COVID world, many at First Unitarian have been having conversations about what the post-COVID world we want to emerge into might look like. Given the systemic inequity and racism and classism that COVID has exposed, what does real reform look like?

Well, it seems we've got our answer. Across our nation, we are beginning to see what real reform looks like. It is raw, and it is difficult, and it is messy. A recent sermon by another of your former interns, Rev. Jeannie Shero, talked about "threshold" moments. She talked about the transformation of caterpillars into butterflies: the total dissolution of the caterpillar into a "soup," from which the butterfly is built. In the moment of change, we may mourn the destruction of the caterpillar in what looks like utter destruction. But we must also be mindful that this is a time of creativity and new beginnings. And as Mike preached a few months ago, those prophetic voices are coming in the form of Black women. And so in that spirit, I ask that you keep in mind a few things:

**Please remember that we need all of you.** Elders, we need your voices to tell us about what this struggle looked like in the civil rights era - how it was hard then, too, and how those who knew what was at stake came together anyway. And we need to hear, as I have from some of you, how not everyone loved Dr. King or the movement, and how the same disparaging remarks were leveled against him as are leveled against social justice activists and Black Lives Matter marchers today: that they hated America, that they were no more than ungrateful, uneducated thugs who wanted more than their fair share.

Parents and caregivers, we need your hearts. We need you to spend time having those difficult, age-appropriate discussions with your children about the history of racism and money in this country. I haven't met an elementary-aged kid yet who doesn't have a strongly-developed sense of fairness. Now is the time to start talking to your kids about how to build a more equitable, better, fairer world.

And youth and young (and older!) adults, we need your voices and your legs and your skills! Find where you fit in. Maybe it's marching. Maybe it's writing. Maybe it's putting your carpentry or artistry or music skills in aid of Black lives. Maybe it's writing your congresspeople, or running for office yourselves. If you don't know what to do, contact a local Black-led organization to see how you can support them.

Please see *Transforming* on the next page

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**Take care of yourselves.** Put bluntly, systems of oppression and power will respond with all necessary force to anything or anyone that tries to take that power back from them. Over the past week, we have seen brutal police attacks on peaceful protesters. That isn't a fluke: that is the result of police forces that were not, as the narrative goes, created for the protection of the citizenry, but for protection of property both in the North (of shipping companies) and in the South (of slave owners). So be smart with your physical and emotional resources: put your energies where Black leaders tell you they will have the most impact. Stay in touch with organizers to know what is happening with police on the ground, and how they are responding. And remember to take the time to rest when you need to. This work, done correctly, can be exhausting, and you need to be intentional in attending to your spiritual, emotional, and physical nourishment if you wish to do it.

**Prioritize life.** A lot of property is going to be lost during this uprising. Property - money - stuff is what we've all been taught to value and protect in this society. That's why the looting has become such a topic of national conversation, where the loss of Black lives up until now has not. And this implied tradeoff between property and Black lives - the idea that a Black life can be given a monetary value, and that that value is less than a storefront, or a restaurant, or a bank lobby - this isn't new. On this continent, it began in 1619 when the first enslaved Africans stepped off of the White Lion near Jamestown, Virginia, and were bought "for victuals." But it came to the New World with European imperialism - with Columbus; and over 530 years, this country has failed to come to terms with its imperialist past or to confront its continuing commodification of Black lives.

So in your conversations and in your actions, prioritize sacred, invaluable human lives over property. Resist the urge to turn conversations from police brutality or the inequity of systemic racism in this country, toward the destruction of property. And when you hear that diversionary tactic being employed by others, name it and resist it. Affirm that sacred Black life will always be infinitely more valuable than property.

**Reimagine your world.** In my last sermon to you, I quoted Naomi Klein: "Crisis blows open the sense of what's possible." In the same teach-in, she also talked about how people will seize on the solutions, during a crisis, that are already available to them. And so now is the time for us all to be exceedingly, repetitively, annoyingly vocal about those "radical" reforms that many of us have been advocating for over the last few years: abolishment of policing as we know it, end private prisons, reparations, universal healthcare, universal basic income... We need to be saying these things over and over until our friends, relatives, politicians, strangers on the bus are tired of hearing them. Make them mainstream. And again, take cues from Black organizers, many of whom have been countering violence and commodification of life for decades. (For alternatives to modern policing, this Rolling Stone article [<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/police-brutality-cop-free-world-protest-199465/>], as well as the links within it, is a pretty good place to start.)

First Unitarian, there has never been a more important time for your prophetic witness, your love, or your steadfast dedication to justice and action than right now. After spending the last 9 months with you, I have no doubt that your voices, dedicated to the unity that makes us one, will be among the most powerful in the coming struggle for Black liberation and for equity. I love you, and I'm proud of you. Go in peace and strength.

## *President's Corner*

*by Mary Sullivan, First Unitarian Board of Trustees*

During these last couple of months, my mind keeps returning again and again to the families with their children at home, trying to maintain any semblance of their former routines and lives. Being a mother of three grown children, I cannot imagine trying to handle the demands of a job, either remotely or on-site, while still facing the care, tutoring, playing, amusing, debating, consoling, arbitrating, etc. of life with young ones at home.

One of my very favorite children's books kept coming back to me as it chronicles the challenges of a father bear just trying to get a night's sleep. I am directing this article primarily to parents with children at home 24/7. Feel free to substitute your own word/s for the word "sleep" in this story. Pick anything that you are finding most difficult to accomplish: work, quiet time, one's own reading, personal space, whatever.

I have included a youtube link to this story being read beautifully on-line, showing the amazing illustrations. I highly advise you avail yourself to this treat . . . if you can find 5 minutes to yourself, that is. Wait a minute: this is actually something you can do WITH your children, regardless of age. Enjoy!

<https://youtu.be/9U9y35kWBvM>

Peace at Last

By Jill Murphy

The hour was late.

Mr. Bear was tired

Mrs. Bear was tired

and

Baby Bear was tired . . .

. . . so they all went to bed.

Mrs. Bear fell asleep.

Mr. Bear didn't.

Mrs. Bear began to snore.

"SNORE," went Mrs. Bear,

"SNORE, SNORE, SNORE."

"Oh NO!" said Mr. Bear,

"I can't stand THIS."

So he got up and went to

sleep in Baby Bear's room.

Please see *Peace* on the next page

*Peace* from previous page

Baby Bear was not asleep either.  
He was lying in bed pretending  
to be an airplane.  
“NYAAOW!” went Baby Bear,  
“NYAAOW! NYAAOW!”  
“Oh NO!” said Mr. Bear,  
“I can’t stand THIS.”  
So he got up  
and went to sleep in the living-room.

TICK-TOCK . . . went the living-room  
clock . . . TICK-TOCK, TICK-TOCK.  
CUCKOO! CUCKOO!  
“Oh NO!” said Mr. Bear,  
“I can’t stand THIS.”  
So he went off to sleep in the kitchen.

DRIP, DRIP . . . went the leaky  
kitchen tap.  
HMMMMMMMMMMMM . . .  
went the refrigerator.  
“Oh NO!” said Mr. Bear,  
“I can’t stand THIS.”  
So he got up  
and went to sleep in the garden.

Well, you would not believe  
what noises there are in  
the garden at night.  
“TOO-WHIT-TOO-WHO!”  
went the owl.  
“SNUFFLE, SNUFFLE,” went  
the hedgehog.  
“MIAAAOW!” sang the cats  
on the wall.  
“Oh NO!” said Mr. Bear,  
“I can’t stand THIS.”  
So he went off to sleep in the car.

*Peace* from previous page

It was cold in the car  
and uncomfortable, but  
Mr. Bear was so tired  
that he didn't notice.  
He was just falling asleep  
when all the birds started to  
sing and the sun peeped in at  
the window.  
"TWEET TWEET!" went the birds.  
SHINE, SHINE . . . went the sun.  
"Oh NO!" said Mr. Bear,  
"I can't stand THIS."  
So he got up and went back  
into the house.

In the house, Baby Bear was  
fast asleep, and Mrs. Bear had  
turned over and wasn't snoring  
any more.  
Mr. Bear got into bed and closed his  
eyes.  
"Peace at last," he said to himself.

BRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR! went the  
alarm-clock, BRRRRRR!  
Mrs. Bear sat up and rubbed her eyes.  
"Good morning, dear," she said.  
"Did you sleep well?"  
"Not VERY well, dear," yawned  
Mr. Bear.  
"Never mind," said Mrs. Bear. "I'll  
bring you a nice cup of tea."

And she did.

I still love it! I hope you did also. Enjoy a cup of tea.

## *George Floyd Demonstrations*

*by Trudy Glidden*

The Denver State Capitol is the epicenter of the ongoing demonstrations sparked by the murder of George Floyd when an officer held his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck. I have attended half of the protests and each demonstration has a different flavor. On Monday about 400-500 people peacefully filled the Capitol's stairs, lawn, and sidewalks down to Lincoln Street. The protesters, mostly young, were attentive and quiet listening to the speeches and occasionally chanting and applauding.

Everyone was wearing masks, and with worries about the Coronavirus, I was easily able to stay 6' away from others by staying on the periphery. More than half of the protesters were white, in their 20's-30's, many women. The signage was great and mostly written on homemade cardboard. There was strong Latinx support for the demonstration.

Daytime protests are peaceful and respectful. But the night crowds attract different people who cause damage. It's a shame because they hurt businesses and give the peaceful daytime protests a bad name.

After only two days I felt tired and immediately empathized how exhausted black folk feel ALL THE TIME. Sad.

An unforgettable vignette: A white man probably in his 20's walking next to me all of sudden raised his hands over his head, and boldly walked into the street to a large white police van blocking Lincoln Street. After checking with the driver, he placed flowers on the windshield and roof. He then did the same thing to the second police van. Amen

Many young folks show up to volunteer early in the mornings to clean up around the Capitol and its parks. City of Denver supplies spray paint to cover the graffiti with two colors per day. The volunteers scour the area. When I arrived at 8:00 am they had already cleaned up everything!!!!

I am glad I am at these historic demonstrations for justice and equality. The chanting and participation in the demonstrations fill my soul with love for Black people and underscore how this country must change.

### **Experience Sunday Service Online Without a Computer**

People can attend our Sunday service virtually even without a computer. From a telephone dial 312-626-6799, 646-558-8656, or 301-715-8592. When prompted enter the meeting ID 466 677 668 and the password 454623.

## *Whole Souul Living*

### **Myth is our Whole Souul Living Theme for the month of June.**

A modern definition of myth comes from Joseph Campbell: “Myth refers to an intricate set of interlocking stories, rituals, rites, and customs that inform and give the pivotal sense of meaning and direction to a person, family, community, or culture.” From this perspective, all of us are living collections of myths, consciously or unconsciously modeling our behavior, identity, and aspirations around images of what we believe it means to be a parent, worker, youth, elder, lover, partner, adult, child, seeker, white person, Asian person, etc.

Campbell believed all of our great art and literature are also expressions of mythological images and archetypes, appropriate to specific human cultures, serving the role of preserving, emphasizing, or challenging those cultures. In other words, myths run deep!

Below are some questions for individual and collective reflection:



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- What myth or myths are you living?
- What mythic character, (from any culture or tradition), do you most closely identify with?
- Think of your favorite mythic legend or story. What great themes or tensions are being played out or negotiated by the characters? Good vs. Evil? Individual vs. Community? Security vs. Heroism? Love vs. Fame? Freedom vs. Authority? Knowledge vs. Ignorance? Other?
- What mythic themes are being played out or negotiated in your life right now?
- What mythic themes do you see being played out in our national politic right now?

*Cover Photo Heather Mount on Unsplash.com*