



Ploughshare

A Historic Piece of Mike's Mind...

by Rev. Mike Morran

As I write these words, we still don't know the outcome of the presidential election, and it's likely that all of us are sick to death of politics. If that's you, I apologize. I'm still thinking a lot about democracy right now, because I think what passes for ours is under attack and in serious trouble.

Some of my reading recently has been about the constitution and the period it was written, 1786-1787.

The rich, white, (mostly) slave-owning men (no women invited) who wrote and ratified that fabled document had a dilemma. They recognized the need for government, but they didn't trust the idea of government.

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Waiting Is Not Easy

by Erin Kenworthy, DRE

Waiting is not easy! Mo Willems, a prolific children's author, reminds us that waiting is really, really hard to do. I bought this book about 5 weeks into the pandemic for my kids, and myself, as a reminder that the pandemic would eventually pass. Yet here we are, still waiting for the pandemic to pass, for election results and the legal fight to follow, for racism to implode, for a chance to see the people who we miss outside of a screen. We are waiting, and it is not easy.

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They believed deeply in the social and spiritual potential of human beings (spelled: rich, white, men) and that freedom was an absolute necessity for that potential to flourish. Pursuing “happiness,” meant to reconcile our true nature in virtuous acts and virtuous living.

Beyond the individual, they brought to their work what can be described as a spiritual/humanist vision of community, in which the meaning of “equality under God” includes an obligation to respect each individual (rich, white, man) as a part of a larger, common greatness.

They felt that just as the inner harmony and potential of an individual meant reconciliation with our deepest and truest nature, our task as a society of human beings was also to reconcile and make harmony with our potential as a human community. Beneath the political arguments, these men shared a foundational belief that wisdom, conscience, virtue, and greatness would arise from the gathered community of people who would be dedicated to these principles.

But they were not naïve. They understood the corrupting lure of power and the cruelty that human beings were capable of. They knew intimately what the shackles of dogma, doctrine, and despotism did to the human spirit, and the near universal tendency of human beings to create those shackles. In *The Federalist Papers*, James Madison famously wrote: What is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed and, in the next place, oblige it to control itself.

The last line of that quote is precisely where our current president and his sycophants in the Senate, in my humble opinion, have lost their constitutional bearings, and I don't think any philosophical, political, or constitutional argument is going to change their minds or their behavior. All we can do politically is try to vote them out.

But that's not all we can do.

The spiritual roots of democracy, as implied in the constitution and articulated in the private writings of 1786-1787 require us to do more than vote and occasionally give to charity. They require us to approach our fellow citizens with deep respect for their sacred autonomy, and to call all of us to something higher and more transcendent than the quest for materialism and power that is leaving our society so empty and so desperate, our planet devastated, our politics devoid of decency.

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Yes, the American constitution is a product of its time: racist, patriarchal, cis-gendered, homophobic, and classist. Even with those limitations, the underlying belief/aspiration is that there is such a thing as the common good, created and maintained by and for free people; created in order to grow the potentials of the human spirit in freedom, while keeping real limitations on the power of government. That is the underlying idea, the frame, as it were, behind the mere words of the constitution.

All of this is and will always be a moving target. These are ideas that have we have to soak ourselves in over time, and practice, with determination and faith. Otherwise they are nothing but words that will pass out of both our understanding and our world.

In hope and faith,
Mike

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.

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Dr. Seuss warned us in Oh, The Places You'll Go! that we would come to a waiting place.

“You can get so confused that you’ll start in to race down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space headed, I fear, toward a most useless place. The waiting place.”

And here we are.

“Waiting for a train to go or a bus to come, or a plane to go or the mail to come, or the rain to go or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow or waiting around for a Yes or No, or waiting for their hair to grow. Everyone is just waiting. Waiting for the fish to bite, or waiting for wind to fly a kite, or waiting around for Friday night, or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake, or a pot to boil, or a Better Break, or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants, or a wig with curls, or Another Chance. Everyone is just waiting.”

- Dr. Seuss

What do we do with the waiting? Well, recently, there is an idea bouncing around our congregation where folks might record themselves reading children’s books for a Friday Night Bedtime Story series starring our beloved community members, for our multigenerational community audience! What ideas have come along in your mind that might ease the waiting? What sort of support might you need to make it happen? How can our community partner with you?

Waiting is not easy. It is uncomfortable in a world where so many things are available on demand. I remember learning to bake cookies with my grandmother who would always remind us as the oven door closed that “Good things come to those who wait.” We are baking up hope and connection as we wait, waiting on a world that encompasses a wide love for everyone in the waiting place. May we have patience and resilience to bring us through to realizing that which we are waiting for to manifest in ways that bring forth love into our world and day to day lives. May it absolutely be so.

Will First Unitarian Exist a Century from Now?

by Richard Erickson, Member of the Stewardship Council

Will First Unitarian Society of Denver exist 20, 50 or 100 years from today?

I am sure that we all hope so. I am also optimistic that FUSD can thrive well into the future so we may continue to provide a home for spiritual growth and remain a community of love, respect and justice.

Is this optimism realistic? Consider our current challenges with the global pandemic. We are bombarded daily with reports of those struggling at this time, yet our church continues to provide hope and comfort for both our members and the community at large. One reason we have succeeded during these challenging times is our church's fiscal health. We have managed our funds well. We have stayed within our budgets, have little debt and continue to see generous financial support from members. This prudent preparation will allow us to weather the current pandemic.

FUSD's fiscal needs are supported primarily through our annual pledges and gifts to our Endowment Fund. Our annual pledge commitments fund the majority of our operating budget, and these pledges remain stable even during these challenging times. (Your Board of Trustees, Treasurer and Stewardship Council can't say thank you often enough – Thank You!)

Our Endowment Fund is our source of long-term financial security. It ensures that our church will survive this current crisis and those crises that will come in the future. It also allows our church to grow in ways that cannot be addressed within our annual operating budgets. The Endowment Fund was recently revised to create two gifting options to allow gifts to reflect the donor's vision of what will most benefit FUSD in the future. The primary purpose of both options remains unchanged - to provide a reserve that can be used during emergencies. The first gifting option also allows distributions from the fund to be made under certain, non-emergency circumstances to ensure the preservation of our physical facility. The second gifting option permits small distributions to be made to our small grant program under the direction of the Endowment Committee. These grants support our congregational mission such as youth and social justice programs.

It is true that the pandemic has impacted all of us, but certainly not equally. I am asking those who have the financial means to consider whether now may be the appropriate time to consider a donation to the FUSD Endowment Fund. As some of us are reviewing and revising our estate plans, I ask that you consider a gift to the FUSD Endowment. Your gift can ensure that FUSD is indeed still here in 2120. For more information please contact Richard Erickson (erickson123@gmail.com) or Nancy Crow (ncrow1@msn.com). Thank you for supporting the FUSD Endowment.

FUSD Q1 Financial Status

by Karl Jonietz, Treasurer

As we exit the first quarter of our financial year, we are in GREAT shape.

For those of you who would like a bit more:

- Thanks to all, contributions are slightly ahead of plan, although actual number of pledges are lower than projected.
- Expenses are well below plan.
- Auction results exceeded expectations.
- So far, while there have been swings, our investment holdings are positive.
- We have paid for the rose window restoration and have paid our portion of the cost of the roof replacement.
- Cash balances are fine and will help to provide a cushion in these uncertain times.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like additional detail; I can even include a few numbers!

The Board Beat

by Robyn Rissman, member of the Board of Trustees

Hello First Unitarian! It's an honor, if somewhat of a surprise, to find myself here on the Board of Trustees of this incredible community of truth-seekers, social justice warriors, peace-makers and lovers of the great wide world. I began dabbling in Unitarianism some 15 or 20 years ago on the advice of a friend, who knew of my "severe allergy" to religion and church. I attended on and off for years and when we moved home to Colorado, found FUSD and attended sporadically, always getting so much out of the services, but not quite bringing myself to really commit to being a member of the community (did I *have* to call it CHURCH?!). But the challenges of 2016, both personal and societal, brought me and my husband, Ian Miller, to FUSD more regularly and one day we found ourselves, with no foreknowledge whatsoever, walking up to sign the book.

I remember so clearly the Sunday after the 2016 election, and how packed the sanctuary was. How palpable was the shock, devastation and dread so many of us felt, fearing what lay ahead, knowing it would not be good, especially for those among us most vulnerable and marginalized. As I write this, there are 13 days until the 2020 election, but by the time this goes to print, we the people will have spoken again (though we may be lucky to know the result by that point). It is my deepest hope that we will have chosen racial justice, economic justice, climate justice. That we will have chosen human rights over corporate interests, equity over self-interest and unity over division. Not just by our choice of candidates but by our support of ballot initiatives. And not just election day, but every day. By how we spend our money, our time and our social capital.

No matter what the outcome of this most important election of our lifetimes (and of course, they are ALL the most important of our lifetimes), we know the work awaiting us is monumental. A single election won't fix what ails us. Only we can do that—first by taking a long, hard look at ourselves, which is what our faith perpetually calls us to do. By addressing as a community what we know to be one of the deepest issues plaguing our American society—white supremacy, the understanding and dismantling of which we now have as a covenant with one another. By doing our best to live our UU values every day (I have struggled endlessly with "all souls are sacred and worthy" over this last year).

I'm overwhelmed with gratitude for the opportunity to get to know you better, to serve our community in what I hope will be a deep and meaningful way and to deepen my own spirituality as a Unitarian Universalist. And when the time is right, I most look forward to doing it in person.

Whole Souul Living

Our Whole Souul Living Theme for November is Generosity, a topic both deeply complex (if we think about it too much) and astonishingly simple (if we simply follow the impulse). Consider the quote, “True generosity is guided by awareness.” The implication is that if we are truly aware...: of our interdependence, of our inherent connections, of the transitory nature of all physical things, of our own truest nature..., then generosity flows naturally. The corollary, of course, is that to the extent that we are un-generous, that is the extent to which we are also living un-aware.

- What is your earliest memory of generosity?
- How generous are you with money or possessions?
- Is it fundamentally different to be generous with Praise, Gratitude, Time, or Love?
- What builds (or destroys?) generosity? For you? Or for others?
- What happens in relationships or community when people are generous with one another?
- Describe what is both hardest and easiest for you to share: Time? Money? Love? Possessions? Praise? Why?
- What gifts are uniquely yours to offer to others? How did you learn this?
- What are some synonyms of “generosity?”



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