

SPRING | 2020

Chalice Connection

A quarterly publication
of The First Unitarian
Church of Omaha

Volume 1 Issue 1



In this first
issue,
we focus on
gratitude &
hope.

What are you
grateful for?



**Mission of First Unitarian Church of Omaha:
Fostering the Whole Person, Compassion, and Justice**
www.firstuomaha.org

Join us this
Sunday online at
10:30am via Zoom

SAVING GRACE: A LOOK BACK

Dave Richardson shares some history and discusses why he believes we need another plaque in the Sanctuary.

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POEM: "The Hole and the Holy"

Rev. Dr. Sarah Voss, our Community Affiliated Minister, shares a poem and we learn more about Sarah's ministry in Omaha.

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SAYING GOODBYE & LOOKING AHEAD

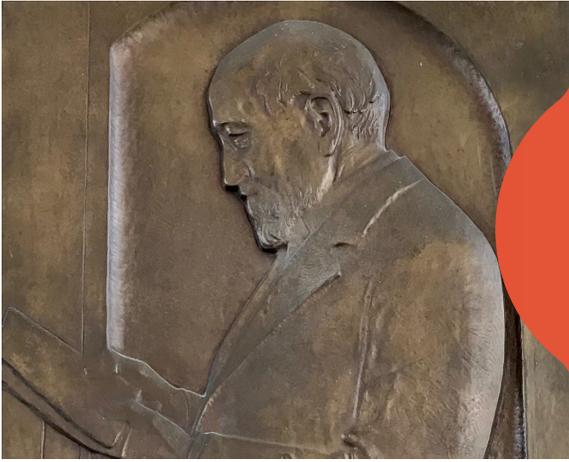
Board President, Joe Schaaf writes about the past year, thanks church volunteers and leaders, and looks ahead to our future.

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POETRY BY OUR MINISTER

Read poems written by our interim minister. Be sure to send your own poems and reflections to the church for the next issue.

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A Look Back by Dave Richardson

Saving Grace

“It is time to formally laud the role that women have played in our church history.”

“Saving Grace”

Next time you're at church and have time to stroll around, check out the five plaques which hang in the sanctuary and the foyer. You may note several important things. First, these plaques honor key figures in our church history, including: Bernard Capen, the “boy wonder” of church leadership, a 28-year-old board president during the construction of our building; George Sumner, a stalwart lay leader in the late 19th century; Thomas Kilpatrick, a generous donor from our earliest days; Alan McDonald, the architect of our building and prominent lay leader; and of course, Newton Mann, our most famous minister. All of these men are deserving of the plaques honoring them. You will note that the newest plaque was hung more than 65 years ago. You will also note that there's a glaring oversight in the recognition of our leaders. This church would not exist if it weren't for the efforts of Grace Holdrege, whose efforts as President of the Women's Alliance saved the church from extinction.

Grace moved to Omaha in the 1870s and became a very active church member throughout the rest of her life. She rescued the foundering church from “the perilous rocks of destruction” as a later board president put it. Following Rev. Mann's retirement in 1910, the church was plagued with debt and internal conflicts which caused many to suggest that dissolving the congregation was necessary.

Mrs. Holdrege described the situation this way, “The cause of liberal religion in Omaha was now without a minister, without a church, and without hope.” A plea from the Women's Alliance to the American Unitarian Association resulted in a grant of \$12,000, which helped to defray the debt and provide a trust fund, contingent on the purchase of a new site.

Long-time archivist, Marie Helms described it this way:

The building was sold, but the Women's Alliance managed to hold the congregation together with vespers, church school classes, and meetings which were held in various available halls with visiting ministers from other parts of the area.

However, it appeared for a time that the church could not be sustained. A pivotal moment in our history took place at an informal gathering of Women's Alliance members after a memorial service for a past-president of the Alliance. It was one of those moments that show how courage and determination can win the day.

The words of Mrs. Holdrege, secretary of the Women's Alliance, tell it best:

It was decided to keep together and do whatever the Alliance could to hold the scattered remnants of the church together. There were 19 names on the

membership roll, but even so small a beginning might prove the nucleus of the church of the future. If we could do nothing more, we could set ourselves the task of seeking out Unitarians and asking them to join us in the search for others.—from “The Women's Alliance Report of 1913”

Growth was slow but steady. Within a few months, Mrs. Holdrege was able to report that the growth in membership to 57 was “most gratifying.” She noted that although attendance at the annual holiday dinner on Dec. 4, 1913 was lower than expected, the event had conflicted with a rally held by the local suffrage association. It comes as no surprise that Unitarian women would be strongly committed to women's suffrage as well as to the church.

“A Brief History of the Women's Alliance,” composed by long-time member Addie Glissman in 1964, notes that during this precarious time the Alliance conducted numerous successful fundraising activities. In addition to selling cookbooks, the women sewed aprons and comforters and sponsored a lecture series. These efforts generated enough revenue in 1914 to rent a parish home at 428 North 40th Street. The Alliance proposed the rental agreement and the board of trustees accepted the proposal.

Article continues on next page.

“Saving Grace”

Continued from previous page—a look back

by Dave Richardson

The church took possession on Jan. 1, 1915. The building was located near the Joslyn Castle, home of church members George and Sarah Joslyn, and it would serve the church until the completion of the building we now occupy.

During this period, the Women’s Alliance continued to be a key contributor to the financial health of the church. It pledged \$1,000 a year to the church’s general operating fund. In 1915, the Alliance was asked by the board to shift its gift toward paying off church debts and it agreed to this arrangement.

In a period of three short years the Women’s Alliance had performed the miraculous task of bringing financial stability and membership growth to the church. There remained two significant tasks: securing a new minister and making plans for a new edifice. Both of these tasks were accomplished in the first six months of 1916.

At the laying of the cornerstone of our building in October of 1917, Grace stood proudly next to President William Howard Taft and Board President William Baxter at the ceremony. She continued her church work until her death in the early 1930s.

It is time for us to formally recognize Grace Holdrege for her determination and loyalty to her beloved community. It is time to recognize her efforts with a plaque in our church so she can join the previously all-male pantheon of pillars of the church.

If funds other than those currently budgeted are needed perhaps

donors could be found. If this item qualifies for support from the Preserve Our Building Fund that may be another avenue.

A commemorative plaque for Grace would show members and visitors that we laud the role that women have played in our history and we honor those who built the fires that warm us and the wells from which we drink today.

Interested in Church History?

Now is a great time to join the Archives Team. We will have evening and daytime meetings and gatherings as soon as we can. If interested, please contact team leader Linda at lparkerlib@gmail.com.

A fun poem

“Mr. diMaggio”

By Suzanne King,
Church Member

Blustering Mr. diMaggio
A native of San Fromaggio
Dwells a top a skyscraper in Tokyo.
Sporting a full mustachio
Puffed full of braggadocio
Toddled with noticeable adagio
On stage for his coveted cameo.
Clearing this throat for his oratorio
Cranked up the stereophonic audio.

Accompanied by Mr. Rosario
Globe-trotting from Ontario
Selling purple-striped radicchio
Freshly roasted pistachio
And shots of sweet amarettio
To generously dressed scorpios
Rough riding rhinoceroes
Proudly strutting flamingos
And highfalutin' calicoes.

Late for his flight to Borneo
For a rendezvous with his Romeo
whom he met at the Presidio,
He rushed through his final aria,
Thanked the day's impresario,
The Decorated Generalissimo
Imbroglio,
And bid farewell with a cheerio
To applauding fans in this jungle
barrio
Who'll again listen for him on the
radio.

Adios, Signore diMaggio!

Stewardship 2020

Stoking the Flames of Gratitude

This year's stewardship campaign theme is Stoking the Flames of Gratitude. Even though our stewardship drive must look different now due to social distancing and the physical church building being closed, it's important to consider how and why we give to the church throughout the year.

We give because we want to celebrate everything about the church that we love. Let's be excited about our worship, religious education, social justice work, and

connections, and this community!

The bonfire, which is the symbol for the 2020 campaign, signifies how we are better together. One lone spark does not warm us on a cold night, but you add branch after branch to the fire, some small, some large, and eventually the bonfire is nice and cozy. You can roast marshmallows, sing songs, and share in fellowship.

With your branch (your pledge), you're helping the church remain a place of welcoming and warmth to all who come to our doors or attend our online Zoom events. You're helping bring light into a world that is all too often dark. You're helping us share the 7 Principles of Unitarian Universalism that guide each of us along life's journey.

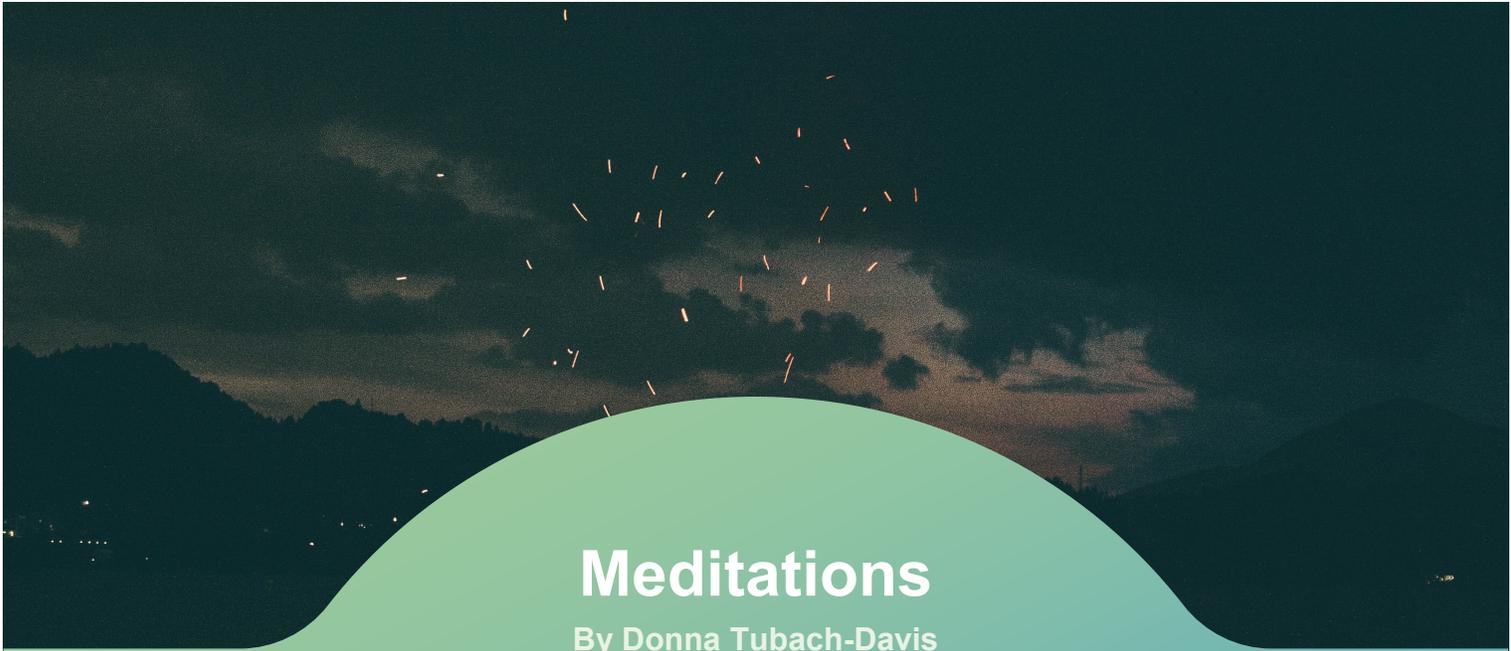
Our church depends on your giving. Our church depends on your pledge. Your church leadership and staff thank you for your ongoing support.

Did you miss the campaign or forget to pledge? It's not too late to make your pledge for this church year!

Visit the stewardship web page any time: www.firstuomaha.org/stewardship

Or contact the church office at admin@firstuomaha.org

Thank you for your generosity!



Meditations

By Donna Tubach-Davis

A Meditation on Love

I have found one of the most difficult types of love is "love of self."

I am not sure I agree with the thinking that says you cannot love others if you don't love yourself.

What I do believe is that if we are able to view our shortcomings, which we know so

well, with understanding and acceptance, we will be far more likely to offer that unconditional love and acceptance to others.

Let us reach out to our world with love of self and others filling our hearts.

Poem by
Rev. Dr. Sarah Voss,
Affiliated Community Minister
of First Unitarian Church of Omaha

“The Hole and the Holy”

“Going to the Hole,” he says
following me onto the hospital elevator.

I turn to the board full of buttons,
push “L” for Lobby, where

the office for Spiritual Care Services
sits right next to the chapel.

“Basement,” he adds, noting my hesitation.
I smile, push “B” for Hole.

I’ve worked at Methodist for years,
yet today’s “Hole” is a first.

The ID card hanging on the ribbon
‘round my neck says “Chaplain.”

The basement leads to the employees’
parking lot. Not for part-timers like me.

We ride down talking about the weather.
It’s nice outside today. Spring.

I get off first, wish him well as he heads
to the Hole, then I head back

to my Holy duties, wonder at the tiny
difference between Hole and Holy.



Learn more about

Rev. Dr. Sarah Voss

Rev. Sarah is a Unitarian Universalist minister, author, and lecturer who currently is a contract chaplain at Methodist Hospital and a state family mediator. Over the years, she has published extensively about religion and math, including articles on matheology and moral math in publications as varied as *Parabola*, *Journal of Religious Humanism*, *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, and *Theology and Science*. She came to First Unitarian when she was still teaching mathematics, a career which ended not long after she found herself telling her College of St. Mary calculus students how God might be like the definite integral of calculus. She knew then that something was definitely moving her in a new direction. She took math with her into Meadville-Lombard School of Theology in Chicago, and, eventually, the thesis she wrote for her Doctor of Ministry degree became her first published book, *What Number Is God?* (SUNY, 1995). She now identifies herself as a math mystic.

Sarah’s very first UU experience was with First Unitarian Church. She remembers how a friend invited her to come on a visitors’ Sunday in the 1980s when Rev. Knapp was preaching about the poetry of May Sarton. At the time Sarah was an atheist and Ron’s sermon hit just the perfect note with her. She came back the next Sunday and heard him blasting away as he processed in full black robe down the aisle to the pulpit; he spoke about hell, fire, and damnation, and Sarah thought, “Oh, no, I’ve made a horrid mistake.” It was Sunday, April 1st and when Ron reached the front of the sanctuary, he smiled and said “April Fool” and then talked about freedom of religion and our faith tradition. Sarah has been a UU ever since, first as a friend, then as a member, then as a minister, and now as a retired but active community minister. She feels honored and empowered to be formally connected to First Unitarian Church as its first affiliated community minister.

“Just Say YES: How One Volunteer Began a New Team to Help Others”

A story by Cat Dixon about church member Kim Callaghan and Youth Emergency Services (YES) in Omaha

If you've met Kim Callaghan at church then you know she is a powerhouse of talent and kindness. She's behind the scenes in many ways, but don't let that fool you. Kim started a team at First Unitarian Church and helped form a connection with a youth emergency shelter here in Omaha. I wanted to find out how this all started and learn what made Kim step up in such a strong way.

Kim first learned of YES (Youth Emergency Services) back in the 90s. Later, she met Abby Borgmann, another church member, who was working for the YES Street Outreach Program. Kim immediately wanted to help because she was impressed with what YES could accomplish with such a tiny space—they helped hundreds of teens every week. These teens came through YES because they had no other options—often thrown out by their families and now living on the streets. Kim realized these kids could have been her own children or her grandkids if life had gone differently, and she wanted to help too.

Kim has orchestrated a monthly meal prep in First Unitarian's kitchen for the YES Street Outreach for a couple years now. She tries to balance what teens would like to eat and a nutritious meal. They have served a variety of meals including breakfast for dinner, chili and all the fixings, a baked potato bar, pulled pork, and beef stew, just to name a few. Her team also provides vegetarian options with each meal. Usually 50-75 teens are served every day at YES.

Kim jokingly calls her meal prep “controlled chaos” as she puts a call out for help and donations and moves forward with the supplies and people who show up. Her regular volunteers include: Kay Lynn Goldner, Linda Hruska, and Lois Norris. Other helpers who have assisted previously include: Kathy Anderson, Wendy Buchholz and her granddaughter, Melody, Sharon Conlon, Nadine Keith, and Carolyn McNamara. This is not a complete list! Many others have helped and donated items.

Article continues on next page



YES Meal Prep Team: Linda Hruska, Kim Callaghan, Lois Norris, and Carolyn McNamara

YES Mission Statement:

To serve youth experiencing homelessness and near-homelessness by providing critically-needed resources which empower them to become self-sufficient.

Basically, we help youth in crisis get back on their feet in whatever ways we can. After meeting their immediate needs for food, shelter, clothing and safety, we create a support system which helps them flourish.

YES Vision:

We envision a community which understands and embraces its youth, creating an environment where youth homelessness no longer exists.

Learn more at the website:
www.yesomaha.org

“Just Say YES”:

Continued from previous page

If coming to the church during the week doesn't work for you, but you want to help, Kim says that she's always looking for people to donate fruit or prepare desserts at home in advance. The individual fruit or pudding cups are perfect for this program as they can be slipped into a teen's pocket as they head off to school, or a job interview, or other activity.

Besides the meals, Kim and her team also collected donations during the holiday season to help support YES's holiday party. Gifts such as warm weather gear, gloves and hats, and gifts that teens love such as earbuds, gift cards, and hair supplies were all collected and distributed. Some months, Kim also collects other items that the shelter needs such as personal care products, toilet paper, coats, and hand warmers.

There is a donation bin in the coat closet area of the Common Room marked YES. This is where donated items can be left. See photo in the right-hand corner of this page. Watch the enews for updates about what the team is collecting for YES.

Another way we contribute to YES is through our Share the Plate program. Each month the church selects an organization to receive half of the cash donations in the Sunday offering plate. The YES Meal Prep Team was the beneficiary for the month of March. The money collected in March will go to future meals that the team will prepare for YES. YES, the nonprofit organization, will be the recipient of the Share the Plate funds in the month of December this year.

The next meal prep at First Unitarian is pending as YES has requested church groups NOT meal prep right now given the social distancing we are all practicing. The best way to sign up for future meal preps or to let Kim know you are interested in helping with desserts or donations in the future is to email her at kjcallaghan@hotmail.com.

If you want to learn more, Kim told me you can take a tour of YES and its centers. Go to this website for more information: www.yesomaha.org. Obviously, tours may be on hold because of social distancing at this time.

Thank you to Kim for connecting First Unitarian Church to YES. And thank you to everyone who has helped prep a meal and brought donations. This is a community effort and we are proud to support YES!



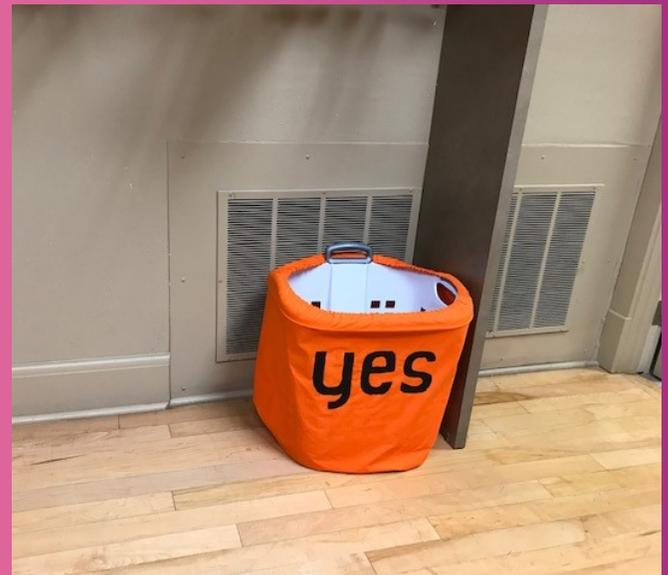
Another YES Meal Prep Team:

Back row: Kim Callaghan and Linda Hruska

Front row: Nadine Keith and Sharon Conlon

The YES Donation Collection Bin:

Located in the coat closet area off the Common Room.





A Letter by Joseph Schaaf, Board President, 2019-2020

Signing Off & Looking Ahead

“It’s been a pleasure to serve as your Board President over the last year. I would be remiss if I didn’t thank some very important people on my way out.”

“Signing Off”

Well everyone, it has been a whirlwind year as your board president, and I wanted to give you a quick summary of three critical things your Board & MTC (Ministry Team Council) have accomplished this year:

First, based on my conversations with the Search Committee (in consultation with the UUA) and other church leadership we’re on track to navigate a successful search for our new Minister (despite the difficulty and challenges of completing this search under our “new normal”) and by the time of this publication we will be close to announcing our candidate. How exciting is that?

Next, we’ve been working on finding Walt Jesteadt a relief replacement for the position of church treasurer, a position he has held for many years. Unfortunately, given the current pandemic crisis combined with our ministerial transition, we’re not able to make that transition just yet. We believe we have a succession plan in progress, so we are optimistically hopeful that we can allow Walt to step away from this role soon. To thank Walt for his ongoing service is absolutely insufficient, but I would like to offer my most sincere “Thank You” for everything Walt has done for the church. Our hope is that we are able to create a sustainable path for this position going forward, so others aren’t called upon to stay on as long as Walt has, and we will continue to work towards that end.

Finally, we have been very busy with preparing our congregation for the transition from Interim Ministry to a new Settled Minister, and a big part of that has been the

stewardship component. Unfortunately, this year’s drive has been thrown a (huge!) monkey wrench. We’re working to make adjustments, so that by the time you read this, we will have developed a plan to finish out a mostly-productive Stewardship Drive. We have implemented a 5-year Vision Plan for our finances, that will now need to be tailored (significantly?) given the new world we live in, but given our healthy financial reserves, I believe we’re on an overall strong financial footing and in good financial hands.

There have been several other important accomplishments over the last year, and I will present a detailed report for our annual meeting, but suffice it to say we have been very busy and I believe very productive in trying to be faithful stewards of your church. It has sincerely been a pleasure and an honor to serve as your board president over the last year, but I would be remiss if I didn’t thank some very important people on my way out.

First, I need to thank Sharon & Pete Piehler, Mike & Deb McAtee, Mary Kay Peters, and the other members of the Stewardship Team who came together to help us “Mind the Gap” and embrace our financial stewardship with “gratitude.”

Lori, my wife, has consistently stepped up to be a most generous hostess for several stewardship and board events, so it goes without saying that I’m very thankful for her support, assistance, and leadership with her culinary skills and in allowing me to spend so much time away from home over the last couple of years working for our congregation (our extended family).

It is with all sincerity that I tell you that the rest of the Board and the MTC has been hard-working and diligent in guiding our church, so I am very grateful to all of you for your hard work as well. It is important for me to recognize and extend a general “Thank You” for all of the other volunteers and employees of our community who help make us who we are and allow us to do what we do—you are all the best and I’m forever thankful for everything that YOU do!

Cat Dixon is a treasure for our church that I hope we always appreciate and assist when she needs our help. Seriously, we couldn’t do half the things we do and our church would come to a standstill without her critical patience and guidance in the everyday affairs of our community. We love you, Cat, and I, for one, will always be at your service.

Finally, Rev. Michelle and Micah have been such an amazing gift for our congregation. She has shepherded us through a difficult time with grace and aplomb. I wish them both the best in all of their future endeavors and would like to graciously extend an open invitation for them to come back to Omaha and visit us down the road. (There is a UUA mandated blackout time where they won’t be able to contact us in order to give our new minister time to settle in and adjust free of any outside interference.) Rev. Michelle and Micah: I say with certitude that this congregation loves you both and embraces you as part of our shared history! We hope our paths will all cross again someday down the road!

So with that, I’m signing off and wishing you all the very best going forward, Joseph Schaaf



Poems

By Rev. Michelle LaGrave, Interim Minister

“How Does My Garden Grow”

How does my garden grow?
 Sprinkle some Hafiz into the cracks of my heart,
 water with my tears
 and thunderstorms
 and set it out in the sun
 on a bed of rich, moist soil
 or, perhaps, some soft, warm blankets
 then
 Be Ready...
 for a cat to come by
 and curl up
 next to my beating heart
 settle down
 and *purr*

“All is One”

My tears water the fields
 My laughter gives birth to the sun
 I am the earth
 The earth is in me
 I am the sun
 The sun is in me
 I am the cosmos
 The cosmos is in me
 I am the multiverse
 The multiverse is in me
 My death gives birth to the stars
 My rebirth is coming

Re-membering— What Being a Member Means to Me

By Donna Tubach-Davis

Stephen & I became members in June of 2015.

It is an interesting question of why I decided to join rather than just remain a visitor. It never occurred to me that if I liked the church and wanted to be a part of it that I would not join. Perhaps, it is one's own individual orientation, or maybe age-related.

Any organization I have ever been a part of I would always join. I did not see there was any tangible incentive, but rather my own individual way of operating.

When we joined there were no membership classes. I understand that the classes happening now keep in touch. I think that is a good idea. There are so many long-time relationships and groups of friends here. Participating in a small group is a good way to get connected.



Poem by Cat Dixon,
First Unitarian Church Administrator

“Open Your Eyes”

Years ago, my friend Shawna convinced me to join her one Saturday afternoon to help feed the homeless gathered in front of the downtown library. Her van hauled sandwiches, apples, water bottles, cheese sticks, and bags of chips. She parked at the corner of 13th & Farnam. The bearded men marched up with their dirty hands and grumbles of thanks. I kept my head down, fidgeting as I sorted—*Doritos in this pile. Lays over there. Cheetos, here.*

I kept busy as if the work was urgent. The guilt in my chest burned; a small match had been struck, but it would be five years before I worked full-time in Midtown surrounded by the homeless and hungry. Now I shake the man's hand, ask his name, smile, speak to his eyes, and do not shirk duty. Five years before I, too, would find the fire to act.

You, there, reading this:
feel the burn behind the eyes, the hot dagger deep in the gut. Yes, try to extinguish the heat with screens and pretty things, but it will scorch your skin, engulf your home as it blazes all to ash. Now is the time to act.



Flower Photo by Scott Kemper

Poem by Michael McAtee,
Church Member

“Online Service”

Your light and spirit cannot be stopped by distance and isolation.

The light of life is reflected from you and into the world.

The breath of life cries out loudly and moves the air to form words of comfort.

The music of life does the same.

Captured by technology and transformed yet not diminished,

Broadcast to your fellow travelers who soak it up with abandon.

Mike's reflection on this piece:

“I wrote this as I was listening and watching Sunday's service on Zoom. It's my attempt to express the emotions I was feeling at the time. I guess emotions don't always have to make sense, at least not right away.”



Stock image from Pexels.com

The Seven Principles

Our congregation is part of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). This membership means we're free to discuss any theology, and we affirm and promote these seven principles:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The living tradition we share draws from many sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront the powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit
- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.



Church Garden: Special thanks to Sharon Conlon and her helpers for maintaining our garden

Chalice Connection

Editor: Catharine Dixon

Proofreaders: Gary Emenitove, Scott Kemper, Lois Norris, and Carolyn McNamara

Do you have an idea for an article for this new quarterly publication? Do you take photos at church or out in nature and want a place to share them? Are you interested in interviewing church members or staff? Do you write poetry? Do you have an amazing recipe that people keep asking about? Do you have an important issue that you're passionate about? If so, please submit your items to admin@firstuomaha.org. Word count limit: 1,000 words. If your plan involves a longer piece, please contact the office. Notes: 1. Articles will be approved by the Editor, the Office Team, and in some cases in conjunction with the staff and MTC. 2. All articles will be subject to editing. 3. Articles must comply with the First Unitarian Communications Policy. More information can be obtained by emailing the church office.

Deadline for the July 2020 issue is June 1st.

Summer issue theme: Growth, Transformation, and Change.

Interested in Church Events?

Be sure to sign up for our weekly enews. Delivered to your inbox every week, this email will keep you informed about upcoming church events and activities. Email the church office at admin@firstuomaha.org today to get signed up! Be sure to include your first and last name with your email request.

New to First Unitarian Church?

At our church, you'll find a vibrant group of religious seekers who have found a common ground where the deepest values of life can be shared. Our growing congregation offers ever-increasing opportunities for life enrichment, spiritual growth, and social justice. Our members and friends are caring, thinking, progressive people of all ages.

Our Membership Coordinator, Carrie Helmberger (pictured to the right), would be happy meet you at one of our upcoming online visitor classes. Go here for all the details:

www.firstuomaha.org/visitorclass

We look forward to getting to know you better!



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