

Autumn | 2020

Chalice Connection

A quarterly publication
of The First Unitarian
Church of Omaha

Volume 1 Issue 3



In this issue,
we focus on
solidarity.

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

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

www.firstuomaha.org

MINISTER MESSAGE: IN THE BEGINNING

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Minister's Message

In the Beginning

By Rev. Shari Woodbury

Beginnings are potent times, full of promise as well as uncertainty. When you start a new job or retire, bring home a new baby, or send a grown child off to the next phase of life, a great variety of feelings may come over you: excitement, nervousness, or bewilderment; overwhelmment, joy or relief; gratitude, and sometimes grief. Life as it was is behind you. Something new is ready to emerge.

At such times, it may help to remain anchored in key routines and to lean on established relationships. Some continuity of activities and people lends stability while changes are also occurring. Here at First UU, for example, Sunday services, the sister church relationship with Clair Memorial, and many affinity teams and small groups continue apace. Some things may evolve: experiments in online worship with Joys & Concerns, multimedia and music; a swell of get-out-the-vote activity; and programs for children and youth amid the pandemic. At the same time, core components such as the church's caring culture, governance, and our Covenant of Right Relations are rock steady. As a favorite chant puts it, "We are an old people, we are a new people, we are the same people, deeper than before."

For me, this new beginning with First Unitarian is a time when you become my people and I become your minister. It is a process that unfolds over time.

During this year of beginning, I have three priorities for myself:

- 1.) To get to know the church community: staff team, individuals and groups, policies and processes, gifts and growing edges, history and vision, "the way we do things."
- 2.) To nurture the church's mission – Fostering the Whole Person, Compassion, and Justice – particularly through the core ministries of worship and pastoral care that I lead.
- 3.) To establish healthy patterns for a sustainable ministry here, including helping my family adjust to our move.

I am gradually connecting with different teams and groups in the church to help me get to know this congregation and how it operates. I'm conducting interviews with key leaders to learn about the church's history and systems. Please watch the church's e-communications for structured opportunities for any interested congregant to connect with me.

Article continues on next page.

How to Reach the Minister

Email:

minister@firstuomaha.org

Church phone: (402) 345-3039 ext. 102 (any messages left here forward to her cell)
Cell phone: (531) 600-8313

To schedule an appointment, go here: <https://calendly.com/rev-woodbury>

Monday is Rev. Shari's day off; please do not contact her by phone except in an emergency. (Email is fine; she doesn't look at it on her day off!)

Wednesday is her writing day, providing focused time for study and sermon development.

She typically checks email on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. For a pastoral emergency any day, please call or text her cell phone.

Regarding email:

- Please update minister@firstuomaha.org in your Contacts or address book to make the current minister's name appear. Unless you change it on your own account, a previous minister's name will continue to appear when you pull up this address in your email program.

- If you happen to have Rev. Shari's personal gmail address in your Contacts, from before she was set up with an official church account, please delete her personal email address. She doesn't check it as regularly and also tries to keep this separate from church work for the sake of work-life balance.

“In the Beginning”

by Rev. Shari Woodbury

Continued from previous page—

Meanwhile, consider the closing stanzas of John O’Donohue’s poem, “For A New Beginning,” which speaks to this moment in the life of the church:

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life’s desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

Here’s to bright beginnings –

Shari



Rev. Shari, Avonelle, and William in their new backyard.

Welcoming Rev. Shari

In August, church members and friends sent cards and drew on the garden sidewalks to welcome Rev. Shari and her family. Photos below.





A Letter from Sharon Piehler, Board President, 2020-2021

Solidarity in a Time of Isolation

“Despite being amid a global pandemic we can share time, thoughts, and learn together through our online events, good old-fashioned phone calls, and socially distanced one-on-one meetings.”

If we look at definitions of solidarity we read again and again about union and fellowship, common goals, and values. This is easy to comprehend and internalize as individuals and as Unitarian Universalists. The real work comes into play when we work to put solidarity into action while in a time of isolation and singularity.

Are we up for this work? What does it look like? How are we to be together and in solidarity when physically apart? This work, to me, seems well grounded in our Seven Principles and finding ways to embrace and demonstrate them in new and unique ways.

We are bombarded with intense media and mixed messages daily in this pre-election time. We see a never-ending stream of racially violent actions filling our world with fear and hate. We hear each day how very right and wrong our personal values are, what we should embrace to be on the “right side” of someone else’s value system, and many other anxiety provoking words, phrases, and images.

Our work to manage through this can be to personally live our values and teach, talk, and influence whenever and wherever we are afforded the opportunity. And how does that happen?

Despite being amid a global pandemic, we can share time, thoughts, and learn together through our online events, good old-fashioned phone calls, and socially distanced one-on-one meetings. Sitting ten feet away from a trusted friend is great medicine and provides solidarity as does logging onto a Zoom call and joyfully scrolling from page to page to see people we are in solidarity with. It feels good and provides emotional, mental, and physical comfort in a time of overwhelming need. We are not alone in our quest to embrace our values.

We also work in solidarity when we embrace the work our UUTheVote team is doing, holding our heads high, and staying focused in living our UU values each day. We remain in solidarity through the work of our Caring Team, the time-consuming work of our Worship Arts Team, the future planning underway by our Board of Trustees, and in celebrating the outcome of our ministerial search process as we welcome Rev. Shari Woodbury to lead us into the next phase of our church history.

We remain in solidarity through financial support to enable our beliefs and principles to become action and reality. We continue to support our sister church in their food pantry

work. I have been there and seen the volume of people gratefully accepting our donations in this time of economic need. We continue to support our partner church in Romania, an area also ravaged by Covid-19.

We are in solidarity in so many ways. I can personally attest to the feeling of solidarity we felt when our family in Florida was struck by Covid-19 this summer. Through the loss of a family member and the illness of several others we deeply appreciated the outreach of so many of our church family to keep us in solidarity and provide comfort. Words cannot describe what that means in these anxious times.

We need to stay strong, keep our end goals in sight, and move forward together, in solidarity. The reward will be lifelong.

In gratitude,

Sharon

“Becoming a Good Listener: How to Build Trust”

By Tom Seguin

Strong relationships are built on a foundation of trust. With our communities in turmoil, it has become more important to develop strong relationships that can endure the division, isolation, and polarization that have gripped the country. With revived national conversations about racism, police brutality, public health, education, and fascism, many of us are left wondering whether our long-time friends, relatives, and acquaintances can continue to be trusted. Many of us also wonder how we can show that we are trustworthy to those we care about, who may be affected differently from us. There is no easy answer for learning to trust or helping others learn (or re-learn) to trust us. Trust is built upon repeated experiences that help individuals *feel felt* by others. In order to trust someone, a person must feel, emotionally, that they are carried around in another's heart, so to speak. Trust builds slowly, is personal and individual, and can only develop when someone is ready to be emotionally vulnerable with you (i.e. you can't force it).

So how do you show someone that you're carrying them around in your heart? Everyone has different emotional needs, so everyone is going to need something a little different in order to *feel* as though they are carried by someone else. The key to understanding another person's emotional needs starts with good listening. Good listening is not a passive process—the person you are listening to should get a message from you, specifically: “I hear you, I'm trying to understand, and I'm here with you.” If you can send that message in a language that another person *feels*, then you are doing the work to build trust. Trust doesn't come overnight, but with consistency you can strengthen almost any relationship—as long as the other person is open to it!

There are a few key elements to good listening that can both send your message of caring and help you understand the emotional needs that people have. First, you must convey an accurate understanding of their message being sent. This can be done by paraphrasing or summarizing what the other person has said in your own words. Often, this skill is awkward at first, because each paraphrase/summarization should end with a “check-out” question. For example: “You felt fine, but then once you got to work, that's when everything fell apart. Is that right?” When you give the other person an opportunity to correct your understanding of

what they said, it sends a clear message that even though you are speaking, this time is still all about them. You can also ask clarifying questions, but you always want to focus on synthesizing and verbalizing your understanding of their message.

A second key element in good listening is identifying emotions. This can be difficult if you are not well-practiced with identifying emotions in yourself. To identify emotions, you can use a skill called “reflecting.” A reflecting statement identifies a deeper concept than just the surface content of what someone is saying, like emotions or meaning. A reflecting statement might be something like, “It sounds like you felt pretty lonely,” or “Wow, that must have been so exciting!” The other person may not explicitly state that they are lonely or excited, but their content and other context clues can help you find the right emotion word that they can connect to. If you have trouble identifying emotions, consider using a *feelings wheel* or other emotions chart to practice identifying emotions in yourself, or asking for feedback from trusted loved ones fluent with emotion words.

Article continues on next page.

“Listen to My Fears”

Poem by Michael McAtee

Note: Inspired by the Soul Matters Small Group Experience

I came to you broken but complete
with the fissures of my being bound up
tightly by the cloth of self-reliance.
Woven mostly in my youth out of necessity, it
provided protection, I thought, for the whole of me.
Through many years the cloth never failed
to hold the pieces together,
but the fissures remained.
Then I found you and began to unwrap it
revealing my broken pieces as a plea
for help in becoming truly whole.
You listened to my fears without
judgment or comment.
Your listening formed a soothing balm
that I applied to heal my wounded soul.
You helped me discover what wholeness
looks like so I might discern its purpose.

“Becoming a Good Listener” by Tom Seguin

Continued from previous page—

The third key element is to let other things go un-said. For example, avoid bringing up a time when you think you felt similarly or switching topics to something else (even if it seems related). Remember, good listening is about putting the other person’s message at the center of your attention until they decide that they have finished. Avoid making suggestions or judgments as well. Another person’s situation is their responsibility, and the message you want to send is, “I am here with you,” not, “I think know better than you.” Trying to “fix” things usually undermines good listening by moving the focus to yourself – let them feel their feelings and don’t offer advice unless they are specifically asking for it.

Letting things go un-said can also be difficult when you do not agree with the other person’s point of view. However, you don’t need to agree with what they are saying to still practice good listening. Your purpose in good listening is to build trust, after all, not to convince someone of the correct way to think or feel. Also, if you feel you are partially at fault for the other person’s uncomfortable feelings, remember that their perspective does not have to be your perspective, and you do not have to take responsibility for their feelings. Avoid defending yourself or “playing devil’s advocate,” and instead focus on understanding their message and the emotions behind it.

And that’s it! Once the person with whom you are communicating senses that you have accurately understood their message and emotion, you have been a good listener and trust can begin to develop. In some relationships you may need to take some additional action to help trust flourish, but knowing which actions to take requires an accurate understanding of the emotional need. By consistently and compassionately connecting to their emotions over time, your loved ones, friends, and acquaintances will see that you are trustworthy and will help them feel heard. Building trust can be a slow process, but repeated good listening will help you lay the groundwork for strengthened social connections and supports, even in uncertain times.

“Solidarity Invited”

Poem by Suzanne King

Breathing into my hike
I take a bench
Slow my mind
Open my senses
Rejoice in the beauty
Surrounding me
I reclaim my true reality.

Sun shining
tiny crystals on the water
invite me
in the innocence
and purity of my birth
to be one
in solidarity with life.

White clouds aloft
Brown chips line the trail
Purple flowers dance
Yellow dandelions dot
Red robins hop
Black birds sing.
I coalesce into rainbow!

Mother Nature's lessons abound
Eternally profound
Inherently divine
Slow down
And become one
Her solidarity is mine.

Why I am a Member of First Unitarian Church

The Membership Team invites church members to share briefly what church membership means to them. As these stories come in, we will share them. Interested in sharing what membership means to you? Please email Carrie, Membership Coordinator, at coordinator@firstuomaha.org.

Abraham Serafino writes:

Once I couldn't convince myself to continue believing in evangelical Christianity any longer, I started to miss out on the community that comes along with being a religious believer, and so I started looking for an inclusive church. The history and founding ideas of UU resonated with me the most, so I decided to join after visiting a few times with the kids and attending the Pathways class. I haven't been a member for very long yet, but my favorite part so far is how friendly and accepting everyone is. I haven't joined any groups yet, but I plan to!

Beth Conover writes:

My husband, Steve Raybine, and I have belonged to First Unitarian since the mid-1980s. I'm a life-long UU, so I've belonged to many different UU churches depending on where I lived. It's fascinating that while all are UU, each church is a little bit different.

I love the RE program at First U, and our sons participated from preschool through the young adult/coming of age activities. I also really like the adult education offerings, including the ones that focus on women's spirituality such as Cakes for the Queen of Heaven.

Steve and our sons are musical, and over the years have performed in church services. I've participated in many different parts of the church including being a board member, chair of membership, RE council, ministerial relations, etc. Although sometimes I volunteered and other times I was conscripted, the best part has always been getting to know the wonderful members of First U....and the easiest way to do that is to be active in the church.

“Solidarity”

Poem by Suzanne King

Lift your voice
Raise your fist
United we march on

Union banner
Working together
Through our label we are one

Shared experiences
Trusted confidences
In harmony, support and healing

Take a knee
Bow a head
Many signs of solidarity

Day is done
Back at home
What choices do we make?

Our solidarity, hanging with our coat
And resting with our shoes
Optional and convenient

Or intentionally, living in our soul
Massaging our thoughts
Transforming our plans

For all, solidarity waits for you
But, which will you choose?
Which one does our world need?

An article by Donna Neff

Why There's FUN in Fundraising

“No other event in our church involves as many people like the annual Heart & Hand Auction.”

For many years now, my passion has been the annual Heart & Hand Auction. I hope I can lure more of you into that way of thinking to keep the auction going and growing. Yes, it raises much-needed funds for the church (definitely important!), but I think the really interesting part is how it helps us connect with each other. If “solidarity” is unity of purpose and common goals, then the auction is a great example of that. No other event in our church involves as many people—donors, buyers, helpers, party goers, costume enthusiasts, etc.

One of my favorite things about working on the auction is learning about all the different hobbies, talents, and interests people are willing to share, like raising chickens, belly-dancing, ukulele playing, needle crafts, bee-keeping, and the list goes on! Who knew? Although the pandemic has temporarily reduced our usual emphasis on selling “a social life” at the auction, think of the many and huge variety of activities over the years that wouldn't have happened except for the auction—concerts, dinners, hikes, beer crawls, TV show marathons, garden walks, etc. And they will be back as soon as it's safe!

We can't gather for a big party at church this year, but we'll have a great auction none-the-less. The auction website will be your go-to place! There will be *a week of on-line bidding October 26-30, culminating in an all-church Halloween party via Zoom Friday, October 30th* with a costume party and prizes.

Show your solidarity and support the 2020 Heart & Hand Auction!

Questions about the Heart & Auction? Email: auction@firstuomaha.org

Go here for all your auction action: <http://www.auctria.com/auction/2020HHAuction>.

Pictured below: T-Rex prepares for costume contest at last year's auction.
Photo by Lillian McEvoy



Ark work by Eddith Buis



Chalice Connection

Editor: Catharine Dixon
Proofreaders: Gary Emenitove, Scott Kemper, Suzanne King, Lois Norris, and Carolyn McNamara

Please submit articles, poems, photos 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 January 2021 issue is 11/27/2020.**

“The Violet Hour”

Poem by Carrie Helmberger,
Membership Coordinator

--titled after song by The Civil Wars

The night before my mother slips away,
I stand by the hospice bed in my parents' living room.
It is twilight. Mom breathes but is not awake.
I've turned on Moonlight Sonata, a song she played
more than 30 years ago at her one and only piano recital.
I try to ease her from this place to the next.

In the kitchen, the caregiver washes the mug
of the tea mom had just drunk this morning.
She calls out to me to look out the window.
On the lawn, less than 20 yards away,
a doe and fawn have wandered up to the house.
The fawn nibbles grass, unaware. The doe raises her head,
takes a hard stare into the house, at me, at the bed,
at my mother. We hold one another's gaze
until she turns and with a swish of her tail,
returns back to the violet of the shadows,
her offspring following closely behind.

The Sarah Joslyn Society

**Article by Deb Duggan,
Leader of the SJ Society**

Sixteen years ago the Sarah Joslyn Society was born, the brain child of Dixie Lemon. As the legend goes, Dixie was a newly coerced (her words) member of the First U Finance Committee. At her first meeting, the team discussed the Capital Trust Fund, which grows from investments and from donations and bequests. At that time, it had about \$312,000, which didn't impress Dixie as an enormous cushion upon which the church could rest. Being her inquisitive self, she asked if anyone had tried to encourage members and friends to consider it in their estate planning. The succinct answer was "No, do you want to do that?" And thus the Sarah Joslyn Society came into being, named after an early and famous benefactress of the church.

Over the ensuing years Dixie's gentle prods, witty articles and pithy sayings ("You'll never miss the money!") have helped the membership grow from 32 original members to more than 75 who have named the church in their estate planning. And that \$312,000 has more than doubled, thanks to those who have chosen to "plant a tree so that others might enjoy the shade."

SJ Society members receive a beautiful plaque made from an original slate tile from the church roof which was procured by Dean Christensen and painted by Sandi Bruns. Normally we host a cocktail reception in the fall, but this year we will not be able to do that; however, we will still accept new members, and we will celebrate and gather next year when it's safe to do so.

Won't you consider joining us as a new member of the Sarah Joslyn Society? Give Deb Duggan a call at 402-553-5477 or email the church office: admin@firsttuomaha.org. We will fill you in on all the particulars. It's the easiest club you'll ever join!

Rekindling Stewardship

**Article by Sharon Piehler, Board President
& Walt Jesteadt, Treasurer**

At the beginning of September, our Board of Trustees launched a supplemental pledge campaign because our spring campaign fell \$33,000 short of our goal. Church friends and members should have received emails from our treasurer, Walt Jesteadt, our board president, Sharon Piehler, and our settled minister Rev. Shari Woodbury. You can read the text from those emails on our website here:

www.firsttuomaha.org/stewardship.

Our reserves need to be protected to assure that when we are ready, we have startup funds for future needs and growth. We need funds now to pay the bills to maintain our building, pay employees, and honor our obligations to the community. We will not be able to honor these financial obligations through the remainder of the church year without further drawing down our reserves unless we close the gap.

Think deeply about what our church means to you and your loved ones. We can all protect and nourish our church through donations, large and small. Any pledge amount helps. Five dollars per week is as important as large endowment bequests.

We are hoping you will recognize the value of what we have: our historic building, friendly faces ready to help each other, a bright future with our new minister, and a community of education and faith grounded in our values and principles.

[Please help us sustain this amazing gift by clicking here to record your updated pledge.](#)

You can also email the church office at admin@firsttuomaha.org with questions/comments or to record your updated pledge. Thank you!

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 that celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.



Community Caravan:

On Saturday, Sept. 12, church members and friends were invited to the church parking lot to welcome Rev. Shari, to share a wish for the congregation, and to bring water for the water ingathering service. To see more photos, go here: www.firstuomaha.org/wateringathering2020

"October 2015"

Poem by Carol Cronin

Trees keen and sway in the wind
Shed leaves like tears
Raise bare branches to the sky
While at their feet....
the leaves dance

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 to 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!



First Unitarian Church of Omaha

3114 Harney St.

Omaha, NE 68131

www.firstuomaha.org

402-345-3039