

Spring | 2021

Chalice Connection

A quarterly publication
of The First Unitarian
Church of Omaha

Volume 2 Issue 2



In this issue,
we focus on
the theme of
Becoming

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: Becoming Together

*Rev. Shari Woodbury discusses
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*It's time to make a pledge! Walt
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*Please join us on Zoom for our
annual meeting happening
Sunday, May 16 at 10:30am.*

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Minister's Message

Becoming Together

By Rev. Shari Woodbury

What does our April theme, *Becoming*, mean? *Becoming* is a process of continual growth. As a church, our growth occurs in community with one another. While each of us has a unique journey, we do not do it alone. We need one another to learn, to connect, and to grow—to become more whole versions of ourselves, and give our best to life.

As Unitarian Universalists, one way we express our support for one another's becoming is through our covenants. A covenant captures our intentions and aspirations for how we will journey together. In the January edition of the *Chalice Connection*, I shared a bit about the historic origins of covenants in our tradition, and we printed the new covenant adopted by our core staff group.

In this April edition, I share with you the covenant that the Board of Trustees and I developed with one another over the fall and winter (see next page). Like all covenants, this one is a living document. That means it could evolve over time. It also means that we bring it to life by the way we live into it. These are not just words on a page; they are heartfelt commitments that we make to one another for the good of the church and its mission.

I am delighted to be in covenantal community with you. I hope you will share with us any feedback that you may have for the church's leadership team.

Faithfully,
Shari

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

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

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

Chalice Connection

Editor: Catharine Dixon

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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 July 2021 issue is 6/1/2021.

Minister and Board of Trustees Covenant

I, the Minister, promise to the Board:

1. To persist in lifting up our ideals and aspirations, and to sustain long-term commitment to these, including in challenging work like radical hospitality and multiculturalism.
2. To abide by the Code of Conduct and Guidelines of the UU Ministers Association in the conduct of my ministry, striving to make this a ministry that is worthy of trust and that restores trust in the office of the Minister.
3. To stay in touch with my calling to the ministry, and share my gifts with this Church.
4. To collaborate with and respect the role of the Board as we make decisions for the Church.
5. To be honest, collaborative, prepared, and authentic.
6. To practice direct communication and transparency as much as possible, while preserving confidentiality where needed.
7. To care about everyone in the congregation.
8. To maintain healthy boundaries, self-care practices and support systems that position me to be a grounded leader in times of conflict and tension.
9. To recognize our differences and that we will not agree on everything, while providing truth and support to be better and best serve our congregation.
10. To expect and promise everything in good faith.

We, the Board, promise to the Minister:

1. To respect and reinforce the Minister's healthy ministerial and personal boundaries.
2. To recognize the Minister's work as fundamental to the Church and to the community.
3. Not to tolerate harmful behaviors toward the Minister, other staff, or congregants, on the part of anyone connected to the congregation.
4. To collaborate with and respect the role of the Minister as we make decisions for the Church.
5. To be honest, collaborative, prepared, and authentic.
6. To approach leadership as an opportunity to serve the community and to grow.
7. To make ourselves available in order to move forward with our growth and plans.
8. To give our undivided attention to the Minister when they voice their concerns as well as joys.
9. To show appreciation for their input.
10. To be respectful of each other's time.
11. To do our best to benefit from the diversity of the Board (and the congregation) in discernment and decision-making processes, while offering unified support for the resulting decisions.
12. To expect and promise everything in good faith.

A note from the Board of Trustees:

In this time of the pandemic, remember that church leadership still wants to hear from you. If you have a question, comment, or concern for the board, you can email board members directly at board@firstuomaha.org. Please do reach out if you want to discuss something.

Go here to see a list of current board members: www.firstuomaha.org/leaders



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

What are we becoming?

“None of our BECOMING is free or easy.”

When I think about this month, a still-raging pandemic and incredible political ugliness, I wonder just what we are becoming. I think of the Black member of the Capitol Police Force who was beaten, called a horrible racial slur at least 15 times, and feared for his life, and then he asked, “Is this America?” Is this who and what we are?

Throughout the past 18 months we have seen countless acts of racial crime, most met with widespread disgust and outrage, but not all. We saw the BLM protestors raise their voices and become increasingly agitated with the lack of answers or even concern about their message. The concern about lack of engagement is alarming. Does much of our country feel they can “ride this out” and wait for things to return to “normal”? Normal - resuming the status quo while providing quiet assurances that concerns are heard with no action taken? Is this who we are? Is this what our founding fathers did when breaking free from ruling forces?

Think about BECOMING and the often painful process. We become many times. Was it easy to become an adult? Most likely we all stumbled, made poor choices, and paid a price. I know I did! Was it easy to become a spouse? Learn to give and take, share and

sometimes put your wants and needs on the back burner? Parenthood is certainly a joyous and painful process, making and enforcing tough decisions and letting go. Caring for aging parents brings its own set of hard choices.

None of our BECOMING is free or easy. It is much the same for a religion or congregation. I was so deeply inspired when I learned about the roots of Unitarianism, the bravery of our founders, young men paying the ultimate price for what they believed. More recent years brought the merger of Unitarianism and Universalism. I’m sure that wasn’t an easy decision. Our congregation’s decisions to become a Welcoming Congregation and to display our Black Lives Matter banner for the public to see were difficult and brave decisions. We did the right thing even though it wasn’t easy or painless.

What is our future BECOMING? Are we at that dangerous and passive status quo? Are the banners and flags good enough? Your Board is doing a deep dive into study work, spurred by reading “Widening the Circle of Concern,” a report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change. My big takeaways have been clear. If we want to grow and prosper, we have to be more welcoming and

inclusive. Diverse isn’t good enough—we need to be inclusive and show that we truly are committed and walk the walk! We know that younger members are looking for a church home that acts upon their stated values. They come in, look around, and stay or go depending on what they see and hear. We need to decide what they will see and hear. None of it is easy.

Listening to our members who are doing Beloved Conversations work I heard them deliberately putting themselves into sometimes uncomfortable conversation and challenging themselves to BECOME. It’s up to us to determine what we as a congregation BECOME! The future is bright. Vaccines will return our ability to see each other in person and resume much of what we have lost this last year.

How will we use that newfound time and togetherness? What will we BECOME as the First UU of the future? It may not be easy or pain free but I have every reason to know we will become what we need to in order to continue on our path to living our values.

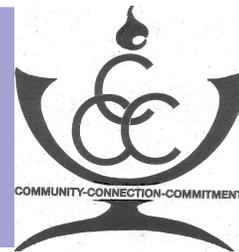
This is my last article for this publication! You will hear from your next president, Catherine Plumlee, in the July issue. I wish her the best. She will be an awesome president. Thank you all for your care and continued dedication. Being a member of and serving our congregation is a joy and blessing.

In Gratitude,

Sharon

Stewardship Message

“It Matters to Me” by Walt Jesteadt, Church Treasurer



Community-Connection-Commitment

Stewardship season is a time that reminds us of the financial diversity in our congregation. Some members are able to fulfill relatively large pledges with a single payment, while others have difficulty making monthly contributions to smaller pledges. The [Fair Share Guidelines](#) suggest levels of pledging that represent equal levels of commitment across different levels of income. Go to our web page www.firstuomaha.org/stewardship to view the Fair Share Guidelines and other stewardship information.

One member with a small pledge noted during coffee hour several years ago that she was having problems and might fall behind for a few months. When our treasurer politely reassured her that it would be okay and that she should not worry about it, she took no offense, but said, *“I know my pledge does not matter to you, but it matters to me.”* If pledging and fulfilling pledges mattered as much to everyone, we would not have any financial concerns.

If you have not already pledged, please do so as soon as possible. We have an [online form](#) this year that makes pledging quick and easy. If you would find it easier to make monthly or twice monthly contributions directly from your bank account or have them billed to your credit card, we have a [form](#) for that too. You can fill it out online, but will need to print it and send it to the church office.

We have a great year ahead of us, but we need everyone to do their part.

On our stewardship web page, you will see our current total of pledges, stewardship testimonial videos, and other important information. Visit the page today at www.firstuomaha.org/stewardship.

On the next page, we have printed the text of Sharon Piehler’s stewardship testimony video which was shared during a Zoom service. If you would like a pledge form sent to you via mail, please call the church office at 402-345-3039 ext. 101.

This stewardship message was sent via email to all who receive the church enews on March 23.

Stewardship Testimony

By Sharon Piehler, Board President

As we flip the calendar page from winter to a spring month, we have many reasons to be hopeful. There seems to be light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, flowers will soon be blooming and, most importantly, we as a congregation have weathered the storm.

Twelve months ago, we knew something dangerous was lurking out there but had no idea what was in store for us. I know I didn't. We were planning a fun vacation to Florida to visit family, a trip that didn't happen. Instead, we are grieving two of those family members. Once travel is deemed safe, we will gather as a family and comfort each other. I long to touch my brother who spent 17 long weeks in the hospital as he recovered from COVID-19, a long recovery that left him physically and emotionally wounded.

Through all of this I found so much solace and caring from my church family. Cards, phone calls, emails, texts. There is no way I can ever show my full gratitude for what you gave me. I promise to return the kindness and pay it forward.

I have found so much in this building, with all of you. We came to Iowa for a career move. I found my dream job, the perfect last step in my career. Even more importantly, we found this church, something we had searched for over a period of decades, finally accepting it didn't exist. To even imagine a church where we could sit together and celebrate our varied spiritual beliefs, learn together and pave a path forward was more than I could dream. Our deep regret is that we didn't find this for a decade after arriving here. We found a gift that will stay with us for our lifetimes, providing peace and joy. There is no way to assign a value to what I have here.

We, as a congregation, managed through one of the worst events in history and stayed strong. We found ways to minister to each other and stay together. Our weekly attendance stayed strong and we connected with even more members. Our pledges stayed strong, further demonstrating our level of commitment and caring.

We have much to be proud of and much to look forward to as we emerge from our isolation and find a way to resume a new normal. To do this we need to continue to stay strong and provide support, support to each other, and support for our church that binds us together. Our current stewardship campaign, one that is a bit different than prior campaigns, has a lofty goal to continue all of our programs, address building repairs, and upgrade our services such as providing hybrid worship options when we resume in person services.

We need everyone's help to reach our goals. Please remember that every pledge counts, no matter the amount. We fully understand that this last year has affected us all differently and not everyone is in a position to increase their pledge. Many of us did not feel the financial pain the pandemic brought and can consider a pledge increase.

My ask is that you think deeply about what our church means to you and give as generously as possible.

Thank you for all that you do and all that you give to each other.

Sharon's testimony above was shared via video during the Sunday, Feb. 28th Zoom service.

Why I Joined First Unitarian

By Sharon Conlon

I was raised Catholic, hook, line and sinker, and in Catholic lingo I am a perpetual “fallen away” Catholic. The patriarchy of that institution grated on me even as a small child, heaped on by the chauvinistic ‘50s of “Father Knows Best,” and surrounded by brothers and toe-the-line-parents. The Unitarian Church was/is an island of reprieve. I signed the membership book in 1992.

I like belonging to a community of seekers and doubters. I like the excitement of sharing ideas, and the comfort of sharing the church space, meals, friendships/concerns, and our aging together. A place where I don’t have to translate churchy words into secular words in my head. And I can come and go without the guilt of not being a “good” Unitarian.

I really like how the church is casual about a lot of decision-making, without multiple layers of bureaucracy. When I gave a sermon about my trip to Palestine, I didn’t have to justify my words to a committee. When I turn in receipts for the cost of plant material for the church grounds, I’m issued a check, done. If I want to make something happen at the church, only my own limits hold me back. There is a lot about the simplicity of this small church that is... well ... simple. I’m involved in OTOC (Omaha Together One Community), morning meditation via Zoom, and Unitarian Universalist Justice in the Middle East (UUJME) twice-monthly conference calls, one with all the chapters in the US, and the other a legislative working group. I am grateful for the fullness and belonging to UU brings to my life.

Why I Joined First Unitarian

By Jack Heidel

I was raised in the Presbyterian Church, became skeptical in college, and have been a UU for most of my adult life. For me it is a non-creedal Protestant denomination in which I am quite comfortable. Sunday morning church services are appealing to me with readings, hymns, meditations, and sermons.

I have been a member at First UU since the mid-’80s. I especially like discussion groups such as AHA (Atheists, Humanists, and Agnostics) and Sunday morning (before church) forums when they are held. I participate in OTOC events and also like our sister-church arrangement with Clair Memorial Methodist Church. Sharon and I met at church in the early ‘90s and were married by Rev. Ron Knapp in 1994.

“Sea Glass”

By Carrie Helmberger,
Membership Coordinator

“Sea glass is ‘just’ glass, like diamonds are ‘just’ rocks.”—By the Sea Website, Trademark

Thrown
overboard, tossed
to the sea and forgotten.

Beaten by the ocean,
weathered, bruised,
and worn.

Unrelentingly tumbled
and ground
until sharp edges

are smoothed,
rounded. Broken bottles,
dishes, moments

from someone’s life,
washed ashore.
Drift glass.

The charm is found
In its unique shape
and color, but the stories

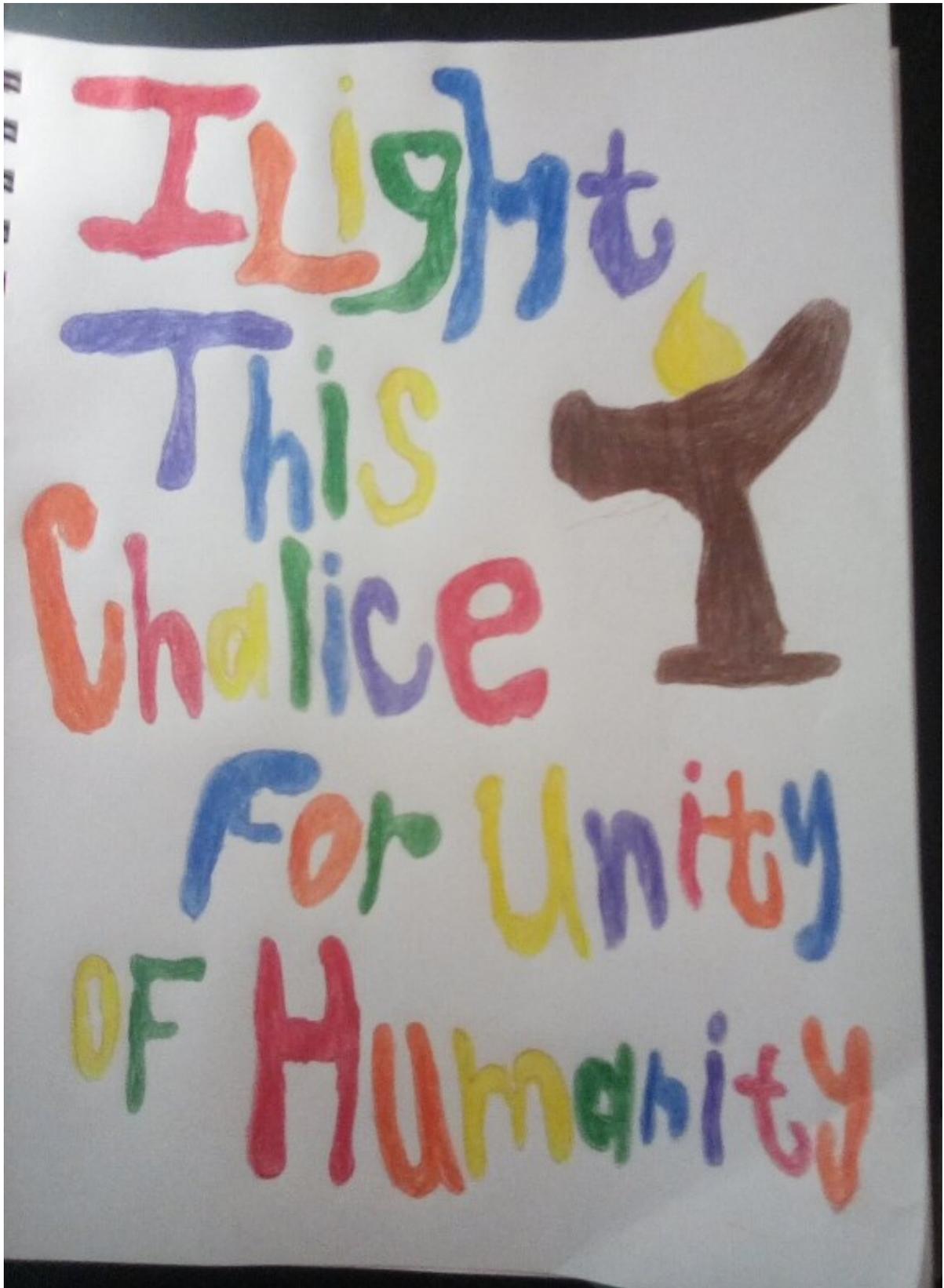
are long forgotten. Each
particular feature, each
definitive characteristic,

giving worth. Who and what
have we thrown away, only
to exploit and use as commodity,

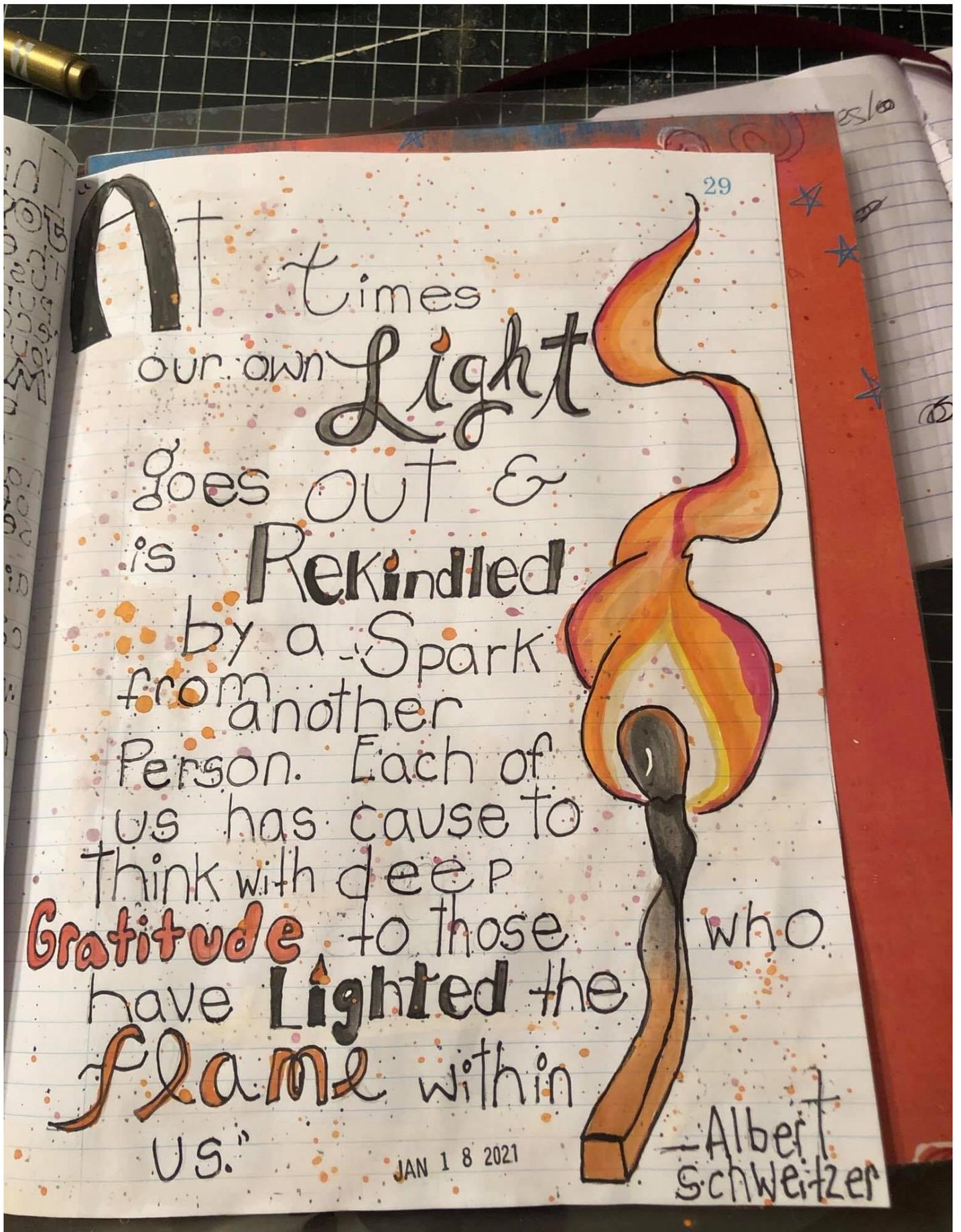
ignorant of the loveliness born
with exceptional,
enduring grace?

Chalice Artwork

Church member, Terri Lynn Brewer, writes of her artwork below, "The drawing/statement came about from my own faith in the 7 Principles and a need to create during my time alone. My personal experience at First Unitarian has been special as I have overcome many things. I found not only a spiritual home—I found a loving group of people, my friends, and most of all they have shown me care and love. Now as I think of *Becoming* it can be a reality even if sometimes things are difficult."



Carrie Helmberger, Membership Coordinator, shared her artwork (below) via her Facebook page.



At times
our own **Light**
goes out &
is **Rekindled**
by a Spark
from another
Person. Each of
us has cause to
think with deep
Gratitude to those
who have **Lighted** the
flame within
us."

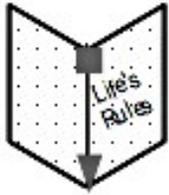


JAN 18 2021

— Albert
Schweitzer

Church member, Suzanne King, submitted this powerful poem below.

BOOTSTRAPS



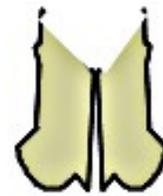
Born into a Nebraska farm family, their 5th child in
6 years 11 days, with two more still to come.
Dad finished 8th grade; resources were hard-earned.
Sickly, she required their meager extra attention.
Worked into her bootstraps refrains of
"finish high school, be self-sufficient."



North Omaha in the 90's scored his beginning
He was third generation family
with deep gang allegiances and losses.
The souls of his Black boots were
sewn and hewn in family loyalty,
the ways of the streets, and survival.



Given life by a struggling single mother
his privilege of American white malehood
defaced as the system bounced him from abusive,
derelict foster parent after foster parent.
With filial messages scant and shaming
his misbegotten boots never knew straps.



Pull yourself up by your bootstraps!
Make something of yourself!
Now, I ask you,
which set of bootstraps shape who we become?
Those of our family, society, religion
or those of the boots we were never given?



Suzanne King

Registration for Virtual GA (General Assembly) 2021 is now open!

Theme: *Circle 'Round for Justice • Healing • Courage*

Dates: June 23-27, 2021

General Assembly (GA) is the annual meeting of our Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). Participants worship, witness, learn, connect, and make policy for the Association through democratic process. General Assembly is an opportunity to gather with other Unitarian Universalists to learn, share, celebrate and challenge each other. Join us to engage in conversations that will shape our faith into the next several years. Last year, GA had more than 4,900 registered attendees participate from remote locations around the world. All participants in General Assembly (GA) programmed events must be registered for the conference. GA registrants receive access to all workshops, performances, lectures, and events listed in the GA Program. Registrants will have exclusive access to a chatroom, recordings of previous streams, and dedicated support. Go here to learn more: www.uua.org/ga/registration.



Self-portrait -- Becoming (growing up) in pandemic times
Charcoal and pencil
By Avonelle Reliford

What is OTOC?



Did you know our church belongs to a 'union'? Yep, we have collective bargaining power. We vote on the issues important to us, and on the positions the union will take when representing us. We pay dues. The name of this union of congregations is **OTOOC, Omaha Together One Community**.

First Unitarian Church is not an island. We are part of a community. Many of our Principles correspond to values held by other OTOOC congregations. OTOOC converts those values into laws and city government policies to make Omaha a better community.

On Sunday, April 25, OTOOC members (that means you) will have a 'collective bargaining' session with would-be City Council members and Mayoral candidates. The event (an OTOOC "Accountability Session") will be on Zoom. You will hear from the candidates on issues important to you. Like any democratic process, this one derives its power from turnout. To learn more and to register, go here: bit.ly/OTOOC042521.

To find out about other OTOOC Zoom events and opportunities, please visit our OTOOC page here: www.firstuuumaha.org/otoc.

An article by Walt Jesteadt

Local Opportunity for Constructive Action

As Reverend Shari noted in her Feb. 28 sermon, one of the ways that we can make a positive contribution to our local community is to make a financial investment in North Omaha through the [Carver Legacy Center](#). This is a black-owned financial institution with a focus on building black wealth and creating strong communities. Through a partnership with American National Bank, anyone can now create an FDIC-insured account at American National and designate that the money in that account be used by the Carver Center for North Omaha investments. This could be a checking or savings account and because it is FDIC-insured, there is absolutely no financial risk. The church is looking at moving some of its reserve funds to an account at American National Bank but we could have a bigger impact if individual church members with reserve money in savings accounts moved some of that money to American National and requested that it be part of the Carver Legacy Center program. Walt Jesteadt and Donna Neff have already done this. Contact Walt if you have any questions at jesteadt1869@gmail.com.

Carver Legacy Center

A Joint Venture With  **AMERICAN NATIONAL BANK**

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.

Notice of the Annual Congregational Meeting

The 152nd Annual Congregational Meeting of First Unitarian Church of Omaha will take place online via Zoom on **Sunday, May 16 at 10:30am** in place of the regular Sunday service.

Eligible voting members* of the church will adopt an operating budget for the 2021-2022 church year; elect a President-elect, members of the Board of Trustees, a Trustee of the Trust Fund, two Right Relations Committee members and Nominating Committee members; hear select reports from church leaders and celebrate our annual awards winners.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, we will host the meeting via Zoom using the same Zoom link we use for our regular Sunday worship services. We encourage your participation. If you need assistance with Zoom, please email zoomhelp@firstuomaha.org.

*Individuals are eligible to vote who have been members of the church for at least three months and have made a financial contribution in their name to the church between April 16, 2020 and April 16, 2021.

Sincerely,
Board of Trustees First Unitarian Church of Omaha

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

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