

Vision – February 28, 2010
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Good morning and welcome to Stewardship Sunday. Today is the day we launch our annual pledge campaign. Unitarian Universalist congregations are self-governing and self-supporting. This means that not only do we get to make any and every decision regarding who we are and will become, what we want to do, where, when and why we want to do it, but also the biggie...how we'll pay for it! Once a year, Unitarian Universalist congregations such as ours have a canvass and pledge drive. The purpose of a canvass is to have meaningful discussions among the members and friends of the community regarding our thoughts and feelings about the church, and our dreams for the future. The purpose of a pledge drive is pretty straightforward...to pay for those dreams! And Stewardship Sunday is when we kick the whole thing off and the Minister or some really lucky lay leader has the distinct honor of standing up here and explaining to you why you should give, or give more, as the case may be. Is everyone on the same page now? Good.

So, since I drew the short straw, here I am! But I don't want to talk about money. I want to talk about shared hopes and dreams, success we've enjoyed and even maybe a few setbacks along the way. I want to talk about our shared vision for

this church, what it means and why it's important that we realize it. In short, I want to talk about us. You, me and all those who are destined to join us.

Have you ever really stopped to think how lucky we are? I'm serious, we really are.

As most of you know by now, Marco & I got stuck in Florida during the recent storms. It was a true hardship which even resulted in a candle being lit for us a few weeks ago and we are grateful for all the sympathy we've received. Our community was very supportive through those trying days. While we were trying to figure out how to get home, I was watching the emails flying back and forth on my blackberry. I saw general 'is everyone ok' emails and I saw more specific emails such as the one from Chris King concerning the six feet of snow on his and Dene's sun porch roof. And less than four hours later, yes four hours, was the follow-up email that we shouldn't worry any longer, Robert Goodman and Leslie & Bob Wright had arrived and helped him take care of it. Less than four hours. Talk about service! And as the day went on and the predictions for the next storm got bigger and bigger, I got more and more worried about our house and more specifically how we'd manage to get into it when (or if, at least that's how it was beginning to feel) we ever got home. Not knowing what else to do, I gave Karen Ward, who is without a doubt the go-to person with regards to child labor, a quick call to see if she happened to know of any teens

that wanted to make some money and would be willing to go shovel us out. She immediately said, not to worry, she and her son Decker would go over there. Once again, our community in action. I learned later that we weren't the only ones Karen and her family rescued that day. Please realize that I'm not trying to single out any specific people for their heroic acts. There are far too many examples of our community coming together once again to help each other out for me to mention here. And it isn't only the tangible examples like these that make our community great. The other day Peggy Fallon told me that for her one of the most important experiences she had throughout the storms, clean-up and mess was the feeling that she wasn't alone. She didn't necessarily need any help, but if she did she knew it would arrive. That's a nice feeling, isn't it. Everyone should be as lucky as we are.

To me, this is who we are today. A community that supports one another in good times and bad and one that is always there for one another when we are needed. A place where we can come when we are in need and sometimes even more importantly, a place we can come to be needed. We all have a desire to be of use and trust me, we are all needed here.

When was the last time you read our Vision statement? Did you even know we had one? It's there on the back of your order of service every week. According to the Unitarian Universalist Association a Vision statement is 'A carefully defined

picture of where the congregation wants to be in five or more years. It is the dream of what the congregation can become.' Ours reads;

"We envision a growing congregation housed either in our existing setting with additional improvements, or relocating within Loudoun County while retaining this chapel. As a vibrant and diverse community we envision a strong Loudoun presence through expanded child and adult religious education classes, initiating a UU principled preschool, full-time ministerial and religious education representation, and comprehensive social justice and community outreach programs."

You may be wondering how this particular vision came to be 'our' vision. It was crafted at a Visioning Workshop attended by over one third of the congregation in early two thousand five and then adopted by unanimous vote at a congregational meeting in May of that year. And then, with the knowledge that communities and the people they are made up of change, in November of two thousand eight we decided to have another Visioning Workshop to check in and see if we were still in the same place. Guess what...after all that work we determined that the Vision Statement we had was still pretty much on the money and decided to keep it. It turns out that we have already defined what we want to be when we grow up, and that we just haven't gotten there yet. So we reaffirmed the original vision statement, and kept on moving forward.

Our Vision statement may be just two short sentences but they are very powerful sentences that clearly outline our dreams for the future. They speak of our desire to minister to a wider community, both inside and outside our walls. They speak of our desire to grow our space and deepen our spirituality and connections to one another. They speak of our belief that what we have to offer is needed and that we must be prepared to provide it to all those who seek us. And believe me; what we have to offer is needed.

Why is it important to you that we work together to grow and realize this vision? I can tell you a little bit about why it's important to me. Our religion is one of peace and acceptance. It is one of social justice and environmentalism. Here you'll find not only Catholics, Jews and Buddhists, but a host of other religious backgrounds. We all come from different walks of life. We've got engineers, bus drivers, environmentalists, retired military officers, retail associates, and not only a psychologist, but for good measure we've even got a psychiatrist! But yet, together here, we are a community. It is important to me that we grow, because if nothing else we need to set an example to the outside world. An example that you don't have to look the same, think the same and act the same to be in communion with one another. As long as Virginia Delegate Bob Marshall feels free to publicly state that a disabled child is God's vengeance on the mother for having an abortion our message of understanding of one's personal choices will be needed. As long as Loudoun County

Supervisor Eugene Delgaudio has a platform to claim that Loudoun County's addition of sexual orientation to the non-discrimination policy would mean, and this is a quote "if a man dressed as a woman wants a job, you have to treat 'it' the same as a normal person", our message of love and acceptance will be needed. As long as even one person in this area needs somewhere to be safe, needs somewhere to be welcome or just needs somewhere to be for a while, our message of community will be sorely needed. I believe that we not only have a duty to be here for those who are in need and seek us out but that we have a duty to seek out those who need us and wish to be with us as well. Every one of us is here for a reason. Every one of us is here because at some point we were in need or had a desire to be needed. And we are still here today because this community has served a purpose for us and it has become an integral part of our lives. Most of you know that our good friend and member Mary Lazar is home recovering from serious knee surgery, in fact her third serious knee surgery in a short span of time...and she has one more to go. I can tell you that Mary and her husband Tony didn't seek out this community because they were looking for dinner deliveries, but you can be certain that they are grateful for the Casserole Brigade right now. And I am certain that you are glad to be able to provide them. We owe it to the wider community to share our message and pay our good fortune forward.

I'd like to talk about these two sentences that make up the Vision Statement.

They're actually two pretty strong and direct statements about what we want. "We envision a growing congregation housed either in our existing setting with additional Improvements, or relocating within Loudoun County while retaining this chapel."

We're clearly still here, so what has been accomplished? In Two Thousand Five, the baby church didn't exist. That was added later that year so we could expand our Religious Education offerings. We've also improved our current space in many other ways. A sound system was added, giving us the ability to amplify and record sermons, so that not only those inside the walls could hear a little better, but so that we could share our message via our website. Our landscaping was completely redone and an actual sidewalk was added at the side of the building. The electrical system has been largely updated and new fans and lights installed. And coming soon to a Religious Education space near you...in April we will be painting and replacing the floor downstairs. If you haven't signed up to help yet see me after the service. I'm told there will be food, but you probably knew that.

"As a vibrant and diverse community we envision a strong Loudoun presence through expanded child and adult religious education classes, initiating a UU principled preschool, full-time ministerial and religious education representation, and comprehensive social justice and community outreach programs." When the Vision was originally written in Two Thousand Five we had a quarter-time consulting

Minister. Later that year we moved up to a half-time Minister. That was also the year we moved from a quarter-time to a half-time Director of Religious Education. And just this year, we hired our first half-time Administrator, who has made life a whole lot easier for both our volunteers and our other professional staff members. Our Religious Education classes are divided into three groups, early grades, middle grades and youth group plus Adult Religious Education, in which both our Minister and Director of RE participate in teaching classes. Our social justice program has taken on renewed spirit this year, as three congregants stepped forward to give it new life. They are coming up with all sorts of great ways for us to be of use to the larger community.

What's next? My friends, I believe that we, as a community, are at a crossroads. The theme of this year's canvass and pledge drive is 'Step up to the Plate' and I think that's exactly what each of us must do. We must commit our time, talent and treasure to making this community all it can be and more. We must realize that what we have to offer is needed, not only by each of us sitting here, but by people we haven't even met yet. We must truly believe not only that we can and will realize our goals, but that we must.

Last year the Governing Board recommended and the congregation unanimously approved the creation of a Preliminary Capital Fund. This purpose of

this fund is to increase our space through the acquisition of real property. With the creation of this fund we have taken the first step toward our vision, and now we must take the next step by forming a group to begin researching ideas and options for solving our space issues. These plans will take time to develop and come to fruition, but there are many things we can do in the interim to continue moving forward.

Through recent discussions among the Governing Board and our Professional Staff we have come to believe that the time has come to move forward on full-time staffing, specifically full-time Ministry. We have developed our Vision of what we wish to become, but have stumbled when faced with creation and implementation of a plan to move toward it. Committing to a full-time Minister for at least one year will give us the support we need to figure out how to effectively move forward. Full-time Ministry can and does take many different forms and while what we will decide to do is not clear to me today, what is clear is that I firmly believe that this should be the next bold step we take to secure our future.

While I believe in us and the fact that we are ready to and must take bold steps, I'm also a realist. I am well aware that the economy is recovering slowly and many people, including some in our own community, continue to suffer. We cannot allow that to derail our goals. There will always be people suffering, and that makes it all the more vital that we make the commitment to spread our message. Let us set our

sights on what we want and reach beyond what we believe we are capable of. Let us abolish the word “can’t” from our vocabulary, and focus instead on thinking of ways to move forward. Let us unite and work together as a community to seize the moment and move forward!

Implementing this vision is not a simple one step process—it will take time and energy to realize the dreams we have identified. We will get there together, one step at a time—and now is the time to seize the moment and choose to move forward. If we do that, and do it together, we can and will succeed.

So, on this Stewardship Sunday, I don’t want to talk about money. I want to talk about you, me and those who are destined to join us.

I really don’t see how I could talk about money when what we are building together is priceless.

Blessed be and amen.