

Draft

WE SAID WHAT – OUR MINDFUL MINISTRY
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Clemson
March 6, 2011

Who is in this room today? I ask myself that question nearly every week as an interim minister. It gives me pause when I think I have the answers to the questions that face every congregation: who are we, why are we here, and where are we going?

Who is in this room today? I am certain about some answers:

Everyone in this room is a seeker of truth and wants to be heard with respect.

Everyone in this room has a passion – whether covert or overt – to make the world a more sane and healthy world.

Everyone in this room today wants to love and be loved even though at times that desire is overshadowed by frustration or sorrow.

Here are some other truths I can count on every Sunday with certainty. There will be visitors who have been here once or twice. There will be folks like Berniece and Albert here who have been faithfully part of this fellowship for many years. There will be people every week who are struggling to understand why sorrows have come to them, their family or their friends. And there will be many who are bursting with pride with joys about wonderful events in their lives. I also know that there'll be some folks here who miss the old lay-led Fellowship days and others who hope the minister you call will be a great fit.

I can also say with some confidence that every one of us is on a mission. It could be a mission to make friends, to be among inclusive people, or to hope for inspiration every Sunday. The mission might be to make the world a better place or give meaning to our lives and those of our children.

You probably are living that mission statement we read a few minutes ago right now.

Now, let me say here that I have a mildly jaundiced view of mission statements. Whenever I hear the word 'mission' I think of the television show Mission Impossible that always began with a scene in which the team leader, Mr. Phelps, would receive a tape describing his next mission. The tape invariably began, "**Your mission, should you choose to accept it...**" The second memory I have also from TV are the beginning words from the original Star Trek series: "**...These are the voyages of the starship**

Enterprise...Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before."

Then there are the corporate mission statements that the business world loves so very much. Here's Amazon.com's mission: "**Amazon.com seeks to be the world's most customer-centric company, where customers can find and discover anything they may want to buy online at a great price."**

Do any of you know the Clemson University mission statement? You probably don't because it has 264 words, 4 paragraphs and 23 lines of text. I suspect it might have been created by a committee.

Churches these days love mission statements and not just Unitarian Universalist ones. Here's a mission statement from the St. Helen Catholic Church in Texas: Mission Statement "**Called to holiness, we dedicate ourselves to the ongoing mission of Christ through the celebration of the sacraments, evangelization and service to others."**

The mission statement we read a few minutes ago was created by a working group back in 2007. It's much shorter than many church mission statements: 73 words, 1 paragraph and 6 lines. It's almost possible to memorize it.

This morning I would like to begin a conversation that will hopefully continue later this year. I hope you will assess whether the mission statement we read together a few minutes ago is still valid. Regardless of how we feel about the corporate nature of mission and vision statements, they are helpful. Mission statements can give us a roadmap to navigate our way as a religious community on a journey of exploration.

The two year interim process is designed to help you decide how you want to continue that journey of exploration. We will work together to create a map of purposes and commitments. Some of them are already in your mission statement

Your current mission statement seems to cover all the bases for a healthy journey of Unitarian Universalism in Clemson. ***To build and sustain a welcoming, caring, inclusive community for all ages, that nurtures each person's lifelong journey of faith informed by reason. Dedicated to peace and celebration, our sacred space provides a supportive environment in which we can create lives of integrity, service, and joy. We call one another to live our Unitarian Universalist principles in our communities and in the larger world, striving for social justice and caring for the earth.***

Good words there and it's a pretty good mission statement for a mid-size congregation.

So why would I propose you plan to assess it again after only four years? The rule of thumb says mission statements ought to be reviewed and revised about every six years.

My reasoning is this: UUFC has many new people here in the last three years and especially this year. You are working through the transition between a completed ministry of 12 years and a new era of shared ministry after July of 2012. What new goals or directions do you want to take now compared to 3 or so years ago? How will those directions translate into a sustainable 3-5 year plan? How will your shared ministry be shaped by those goals and direction?

I mention this mission of shared ministry because of the challenges that lie ahead for all of us as religious liberals and world citizens. We need only look at the continuing political and economic turmoil to see trials ahead. We think of the Middle East but also here at home in America; we need only look at the price of gasoline and the resistance to alternative power generation. The list seems endless.

Why look again at your mission statement? If you here in Clemson can imagine a fellowship two or three times your size now, they are out there waiting but have no idea where you are or what your mission in the world can be. How would you bring them here?

This is why I mention 'mindful' as a part of this mission ministry. Mindfulness in Buddhist teaching is one of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. Mindfulness is defined as **“to be aware and mindful in all activities and movements both physical and mental.”**

As I read your mission statement, I read these highlighted actions: **build, sustain, nurture, provide, create, call, strive, and care.** Each of these actions invites us to be aware of our thoughts, words and deeds as religious liberals. To **build** a welcoming community means we invite a friend to church; to **create** a life of integrity, service and joy means we volunteer for social hour prep or cleanup or we help with teaching our children. To **nurture** ourselves, we might sign up for a covenant group.

Who are the people I see here today? I see dedicated and caring people who love the world as you believe it might become. I see a people who get up on Sunday morning to help with children or greet newcomers or plan refreshments after service. I see a people who sometimes get weary of all the injustices and the accusations that we're the religion where anyone believes whatever they want. I see a people who want to call out to the world: **we are here and this is our ministry one person at a time.**

Every one of you here today can be mindful of your mission in the world inside this sacred space and beyond your doors. Your mission, should

you choose to accept it, is to truly live and grow more powerful in numbers and in influence. I'd like to end my remarks before our conversation with a poem by Marge Piercy that speaks to power and mission far better than I can:

What can they do
to you? Whatever they want.
They can set you up, they can
bust you, they can break
your fingers, they can
burn your brain with electricity,
blur you with drugs till you
can't walk, can't remember, they can
take your child, wall up
your lover. They can do anything
you can't stop them
from doing. How can you stop
them? Alone, you can fight,
you can refuse, you can
take what revenge you can
but they roll over you.
But two people fighting
back to back can cut through
a mob...
...Two people can keep each other
sane, can give support, conviction,
love, massage, hope, sex.
Three people are a delegation,
a committee, a wedge. With four
you can play bridge and start
an organization. With six
you can rent a whole house,
eat pie for dinner with no
seconds, and hold a fund raising party.
A dozen make a demonstration.
A hundred fill a hall.
A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter;
ten thousand, power and your own paper;
a hundred thousand, your own media;
ten million, your own country.

It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again and they said no,
it starts when you say We
and know you who you mean, and each
day you mean one more.