



Horizons Journal

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix

September 2014



The Unexpected Path of Commitment

Reverend Susan Frederick-Gray

What does commitment mean to you? What are the commitments you have in your life? Is it possible that commitment is becoming a path less traveled these days?

When I was first considering marriage – and feeling a little, well I’ll just say it – scared of making the commitment, a pastoral counselor told me that commitment is a journey. She said it is a journey that goes from choosing to commit, to doubting and uncertainty, to choosing again to commit. I was glad to get this perspective early. It reminds us that commitment isn’t a onetime thing, and that anything that requires commitment, whether it be to a relationship, to parenting, to a cause, to a value, to a community, isn’t easy and there will be times when we will honestly struggle and even question

our commitments. To know that this is natural, somehow makes it easier when you experience it.

We live in a time when ideas of duty and obligation are secondary to choice. This is not a bad thing. It provides opportunity for freedom and equality that is invaluable. It is choice that makes something a commitment and not an obligation, but the work of commitment is choosing it again and again, despite times of doubt or even disillusionment.

Choice is a gift. Something we choose has a value deeper than something we are told we must do, told we must believe. But choice is also more complicated. Ideas of choice, rather than obligation, make it possible for us to live without deep commitments. In this age of choice, there is much more emphasis on immediate gratification, personal

Continued page 6



The Something I Can Do

Reverend Linda Lawrence

When I was a child, I discovered Edward Everett Hale’s words in a book of poetry: “I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.”

That quote really made an impression on me. As an idealistic teen and young adult, I was determined to find the *one* something I was called to do, the *one* important cause to which I would devote my life. Later, I learned that any effort to dismantle any form of oppression had ripple effects that benefitted work to end all oppressions. That was an important lesson, but it didn’t simplify or clarify my desire to commit to “the something” I would do. We Unitarian Universalists aim to live our values in the here and now, yet we are susceptible to analysis

paralysis when making decisions about commitments of time, talent, and resources. I’m here to tell you that it’s important to commit to *something*, no matter how small that commitment may seem.

As I approach retirement and continue a lifelong struggle to maintain a healthy balance, I think of my mother. She retired from her job as a school secretary and decided that she was done working at pretty much everything. She refused to make any regular commitments to classes, clubs, volunteer work, causes or church groups. She said she didn’t want to be tied down. She didn’t want to have to get up and leave the house if she didn’t feel like it. While this sounded like freedom to her, it led instead to isolation, loneliness, boredom, and depression.

Mom’s retirement years were a lesson to me too. I decided that the last third of my life would be

Continued page 5



Something to Experience Fully

Benjie Messer

Music Director

Many times when I was a child, my father told me the story of Samuel Scudder's "The Student, The Fish, and Agassiz." In this essay, Scudder enters Harvard University and his professor gives him his first assignment – to look at a single fish. "Take this fish and look at it," says Prof. Agassiz. "By and by I will ask you what you have seen." After ten minutes, Scudder believes that he has seen everything about the fish, and after an hour, he's bored out of his mind. Agassiz returns after several hours and asks, "What is it like?" Scudder briefly relates what he has noticed – where the fish's body parts are, what they look like, etc. – but his professor is disappointed. "You have not looked very carefully," he says, "look again!" Scudder carefully studies the fish all afternoon and discovers more and more new things, until he sees "how just the professor's criticism had been." The next morning, Agassiz happily listens to all of Scudder's new discoveries and then assigns him to continue looking at the same fish for another two full days! Scudder studies various fish in this way for eight months. He writes that he was sorry to "leave his [fish] friends" when he moved on to insects, and he credits this first lesson in observation with much of his later success as an entomologist.

I can only assume that I was bored and impatient a lot as a child – after all, most children are! – and that my dad told me this story as a lesson. I don't know if it ever helped me then – having found Scudder's original essay now, I definitely didn't remember it quite right! – but I think it says a lot about commitment. It shows how sticking with something can lead to greater understanding than we can expect at the beginning, and how being committed to something can change our perspective on it, change it from something boring into something full of intricacies, something to be experienced fully.

This is true of music, of course – the more attention you pay, the more there is to experience – and some of the most committed musicians at UUCP are our choir members. They rehearse every

week on Wednesday night and sing in services every other Sunday. Through their commitment, just by showing up every week, their relationships with music, with each other, and with our congregation are deepened. Like the student and the fish, it's hard to understand how much there is to singing in a choir until you try it. The fall is a perfect time to join our choir, so if any of you out there would like to take on this commitment, please let me know. We're always happy to welcome new singers! I will be directing the choir in an interim capacity this fall, while I figure out whether to continue doing it myself or to hire a new choir director, and I can promise that we'll have a wonderful fall, full of beautiful music and musical learning.

If you have experience on a musical instrument that you've never mentioned to me, please let me know that too! One of my long-term goals for our music program is to give instrumental musicians groups like the choir to commit to, where they can build and deepen their relationships and their musicianship as they rehearse. Right now, UUCP's a cappella group One Breath and our trombone quartet rehearse and participate in services regularly, and our bluegrass band The Heretics gave their first service over the summer. Our informal ukulele circle also flourished last year, meeting almost every week between services! So I think this part of the program is going well.

I'm not asking any of our musicians to be overcommitted (that's another article!), but whether we participate or simply observe, I hope that our music program gives us all a chance to enjoy the pleasure of commitment: commitment to our own love of music, to our musical peers, and to our congregation. □

The moment we cease to hold each other,
the moment we break faith with one another,
the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.

James Baldwin



The Intersection of Commitment & Purpose

Anne Byrne

Director, Children's Ministries

My niece, Melanie, now a young adult, had a bit of a rough start to college. Her head wasn't in the game, so she performed poorly. Later, she adjusted her attitude and effort and became an excellent student, proclaiming, "School is a lot more interesting when you are prepared." I have the same experience in the women's community choir where I sing. At the beginning of the season, I am typically pretty lazy and don't practice much. As a result, rehearsals are hard and not really much fun. About the time I get discouraged and want to quit, anxiety about the upcoming concert kicks in, and I start practicing more. Lo and behold, the rehearsals are more fun.

Children clearly need to learn about the importance of commitment as a life skill. Commitment to others makes you dependable, which is a very desirable trait in interpersonal, team, work and other relationships. After all, commitment produces amazing results. The famous Margaret Mead quote sums it up: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

While it is important for children to understand the role commitment plays in our collective well-being, so too must they know and understand the internal benefits of commitment. The more commitment you demonstrate to your team, for example, the more meaningful the experience. Your athletic skills will be more likely to increase, your team will hold you in higher regard, and combined with other's commitment, your team is more likely to score and win.

When your child experiences the benefits of commitment, make sure to call it out. "It's really great you scored a goal at your soccer game today. Your commitment to practicing has really paid off." Model and describe your own efforts, both successful and otherwise, with commitment: "I have been trying to lose weight for months, but it wasn't until I got committed that my dieting starting to work."

Here at UUCP and in life, living our commitments creates purpose, meaning and good

self-esteem. In my job here, I am often called upon to request the help and engagement of volunteers. I sometimes feel guilty, worried about the demands I might be adding to another's load. Not long after I started working here, I needed some technical support to get my computer up and running. I was instructed to contact member Jeff Newman who provides technical help to the congregation as a volunteer. This is what Jeff does for his livelihood, so I hesitated to call him.

Once I got around to it, and he come out to help me, I was apologetic about the time and energy I needed from him. Jeff quickly set me straight – "Dealing with the computers here is my personal ministry. This is how I express my faith." Certainly, Jeff's commitment to our aging computers at UUCP benefits the staff and the congregation as a whole, but it also provides Jeff with a purposeful way to plug in and utilize his unique skills.

Not long ago, we considered dignity as one of our monthly worship themes. We explored how dignity is fueled by a sense of purpose, and I suggest now that purpose is in turn fueled by commitment. I may feel like it is my purpose to be a good friend, but without the commitment to take the steps necessary to be that friend, my purpose is shallow and my sense of dignity is incomplete.

For most of us, it is probably not a lack of commitment that challenges us, but rather over-commitment. I have been known to overcommit once or twice in my life. What ends up happening is I don't do a particularly good job meeting any of my commitments and my self-esteem and sense of purpose tanks as a result.

At times like these I think of commitment as external to me – things I need to do and be for other people. But, in order for commitment to be useful and sustainable, it must provide intrinsic benefit to an internal sense of purpose and dignity.

So by all means, be committed and teach your children to commit well, but remember, commitment is not just about the outside world. Real commitment fuels a sense of purpose and personal dignity. □



Passing the Torch

Linda Bellantoni

President, Board of Trustees

One of my favorite things about being on the Board of Trustees, and specifically about being President, is the opportunity it affords me to get to know so many more people in our congregation, to hear what matters to them and to talk with them about what's on their minds. I love it when someone seeks me out to share an idea, ask a question, tell me how much they enjoy some aspect of UUCP life, or even complain about something or let me know how we can do better.

Over the last year-and-a-half, the Board has made deliberate and concerted efforts to reach out to and connect with the congregation, to open avenues for dialog, provide opportunities for engagement, and create space for a deepening of our bonds of community. I feel that many of these efforts have been encouragingly successful. I hope you'll agree that we've made at least *some* progress in that area! We're not perfect, of course, and improving communication within any group is a never-ending goal – but we're committed to increasing our openness and transparency, while inviting the congregation's involvement and participation in our collective discernment.

A primary focus of that discernment in the coming year will be a congregation-wide 'Visioning' process. The intended outcome, an updated Vision Statement, is an important component of our Strategic Plan (along with our Mission, Ends Statements, and Values). The Vision captures and articulates our collective aspiration; it's a descriptive

statement of who we want to be – at our best – and it acts as a 'pole star' that guides us towards the future.

Many of you will remember that our current Strategic Plan was developed over two to three years following our transition to Policy Governance and the subsequent calling of Rev. Susan. But Strategic Planning is not a one-time process, and a Strategic Plan is a living, dynamic document. Strategy development and execution is a highly iterative process that requires regular alignment and re-validation. To me, it's where the contemplative discernment inherent in a religious community meets pragmatic organizational leadership, and it is one of the most important things we do together as a congregation.

You will be hearing more about this process in the coming months. The Board is currently looking at different options for engaging the congregation in these important discussions. I'm hoping that we can build upon the good work we accomplished last year to begin a deep, significant, and meaningful discussion of who we are and where we're going. We invite you to participate. We welcome your views. We want to hear what you have to say.

This month, the worship theme is Commitment. Are you committed to helping to define the future of UUCP? Are you committed to help build that future? The first step is easy, and it begins with a conversation. Join in. □

The irony of commitment is that it's deeply liberating – in work, in play, in love. The act frees you from the tyranny of your internal critic, from the fear that likes to dress itself up and parade around as rational hesitation. To commit is to remove your heart as the barrier to life.

Anne Morriss

Continued from "Something..." page 1
one of new or renewed commitment. I have been dancing around the edges of commitment to one of the important civil rights movements of our era: ending discrimination against brown-skinned Americans and, in particular, migrants from Mexico and Central America. Recently, I decided that I wanted to make a greater commitment to this cause.

Who am I to make such a commitment? What hubris! I am not a Ghandi or a King or a Mother Theresa. I'm not even a Sandy Weir who works tirelessly with migrant groups in the Valley or a Rev. Susan who has become one of the leading UU voices and faces for immigration reform. I cannot speak eloquently in Spanish – or even in English sometimes! What can I possibly do to make a difference?

Here's what I've done. Slowly, over time, I've taken steps to learn more about the complexity of the issues facing the Latino/a people of our country. I've written letters, made donations, rallied with partner groups, met with legislators, and assisted in application processes for citizenship and for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. Most recently, I participated in an act of civil disobedience with Rev. Susan, Sandy Weir, and many other people of faith who were arrested in front of the White House during an appeal to President Obama to extend DACA, to end deportations, to stop separating families. But there's more to be done. Deportations continue at the alarming rate of 1,100 per day. Families are separated. Children who have made perilous journeys across the border to escape violence and poverty are denied due process. I have

to do the something I can do. That something is to stand in solidarity with other people of faith, including those most affected, and say, "Stop this madness!"

Maybe you're not a social activist. What can you do? What are your commitments? No matter your age or stage or responsibilities in life, there are many, many ways – large and small – to get involved, to be committed to something important and worthwhile. One of the best commitments you can make is to volunteer your time, talent, and treasure to UUCP. Why? Our UU values and our religious community give us and others the courage and strength to act in the world, to make good on our commitments – whether those commitments are to ourselves, to our partners, families, and friends, to our jobs, our avocations, or to causes we believe will make the world a better place.

Did you know that it takes 70-75 people (not including paid staff) to support our Sunday morning programs on most of our two-service Sundays? That figure doesn't even include the board and committee members and Small Group Ministry facilitators who do so much other behind-the-scenes work to make things happen here! When you make a commitment to serve UUCP, you are supporting spiritual growth for everyone, yourself included. You are building a beloved community. You are strengthening and empowering all of us to take justice, equity, and compassion into our families, workplaces, and communities. What is that "something you can do" to support UUCP and help all of us put our UU values to work in the world? □

At the moment of commitment, the entire universe conspires to assist you. – Goethe

Infinitely more important than sharing one's material wealth is sharing the wealth of ourselves – our time and energy, our passion and commitment, and above all, our love. – William E. Simon

You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream. – C.S. Lewis

The difference between involvement and commitment is like ham and eggs. The chicken is involved; the pig is committed. – Martina Navratilova



Community & Commitment

Heidi Parmenter

Business Administrator

I am one of the money people at UUCP – meaning that I work with the Finance and Stewardship Committees to prepare and oversee our annual budget. I also work with our bookkeeper to make sure everyone's pledge statements are accurate and timely. So, when I think about commitment, I think about what a difference the financial commitment of our members makes to UUCP and beyond.

I recently have witnessed several examples of the difference members make through their financial commitment to UUCP. One was when Rev. Susan clearly communicated to all of us the effects we would have faced if we did not meet our 2014-15 Stewardship Goal of \$450,000. We wouldn't have been able to hire staff that would enable us to revitalize our Justice Ministries and prepare for an Intern Minister. We wouldn't have been able to continue the level of commitment to fair compensation and benefits to our staff that the UUA calls us to do. We wouldn't have been able to offer Community Nights.

Upon hearing this news, a one-time matching gift was offered and members were asked to increase their pledges or make one-time gifts to

meet this match and ultimately make our goal. In response, 13 of the 276 households who pledged increased their pledges even more and seven households gave additional one-time gifts. In total we raised \$465,508 and exceeded our goal! This success followed our earlier Mini-Capital Campaign drive that also exceeded our goal back in January. Twice in one year members showed incredible financial commitment to UUCP!

Financial commitment to UUCP is what turns our mission statement into action and convinces me that our mission, and our Unitarian Universalist faith, is indeed making a difference in all of our lives. Being a part of this commitment to the mission and our UU faith inspires me to be a more generous and grateful person. Sometimes, I wonder, what if I had not taken this job eight years ago? Would I have learned what I know now of commitment and generosity? Where else would I have been exposed to daily inspiration of both these virtues? I don't have an answer to that, only an ever-deepening appreciation and commitment to this faith community. I am grateful to be a part of the many ways we all live our commitment to UUCP. □

Continued from "Unexpected..." page 1
preference and less demand or interest in the hard work and sacrifices that commitment requires. If we don't have to stay when something gets difficult, why stay?

Yes, certainly there are times where we have to make an ending, when we have to let go of a commitment we have made, for our own health and well-being, or because we truly are being called in a new way. Discerning if we are in a place of uncertainty that will lead back to a renewed commitment or to different road entirely is the most difficult personal work one can do and it is accompanied by real grief. And yet, this should not keep us from the risk nor the investment. For it is

through commitment that our lives are deepened and woven with meaning.

We experience meaning through the people and the values that matter to us, when we dedicate some portion of ourselves to something beyond our individual life. And the doorway to experiencing the fullness of life and a deep knowing for who we are comes when we challenge ourselves, when our strength is tested, when we risk and face uncertainty because of something we love dearly. May our exploration this month of the theme of Commitment invite us to reflect on where we have invested ourselves, and on whether and how it reflects who we hope to be. □

Unicare News

In remembrance:

- James Cherry, son of Gene Cherry, May 2014 – memorial service will be held 11/15/14
- Steve Lackey, June 27
- Steve Osder, June 29
- Amy Miskell's father, July 2014

Serious illness/hospitalization:

- Alice Williamson, hospitalized with a broken hip in July
- Brian Vance, the son of Linda Vance and Larry Reed, optical cancer removed in August

Milestone celebrations:

- Ken and Jane Christoffersen's son, Jack, graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point on May 28 and was handed his diploma by President Obama
- Bob Kaiser and Kay Grams were married in May after eight years together
- Ariza Ann Gertrude Kurtz was adopted successfully adopted by Karen Kurtz on July 1

Other news:

- Jon Poblador departed to a teaching position in China in July
- Mike and Delphine Smith will be returning to Sint Maarten after Del's successful completion of treatment for breast cancer
- Fred Garza's family moved from Texas to Arizona!
- Emily and Doug Helton-Riley were approved to become adoptive parents
- Ceyshe' Napa will be working with Native American Connections as their 2014-2015 Public Ally starting September 15

For more information on significant events in the life of UUCP members/friends, sign up to be on our Unicare email list at unicare@phoenixuu.org.



Ceyshe' Napa, Unicare Coordinator

Memorial Garden



friends whose ashes were interred in the Memorial Garden this season in past years are still remembered

July:

Carl Roland Ely
Melvyn Earl Fair

August:

Roberta Chamberlain
Howard Irvine
Lawanda Jane Roach Mc Vey
Tom Parker
Rose Ruttkay

September:

Warren Herbert Amster
William Blauvelt Bishop
Phillip Kevin Bliklen
Betty Halsema Foley
Julia Michelle Fritts
Sarah Patterson Ingersoll
Betty K. Irvine
Thomas Stephan Kole
Erika Michaud

Mary Ellen Mussman
Arthur Wilfred Olsen
William Eugene Swineford

September Worship Theme:

Commitment

Services bring our community together at 9:30 AM and 11:15 AM

September 7: Multigenerational Water Communion Service: *Jumping In!*

Service Leaders: Revs. Susan Frederick-Gray and Linda Lawrence, Anne Byrne and Benjie Messer

This all-ages service celebrates community. It's also our annual ingathering, a kick-off to the year. Everyone is invited to bring water from a place that holds significance for you. We mingle these waters together as a symbol of how our lives are woven together in community.

September 14: *Afraid of Commitment?*

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Let's be honest, committing to someone or something can be scary. There is risk involved and pain. It makes some people avoid it entirely. Let's explore why we fear and what we miss when we can't commit.

September 21: *Committing to Heresy*

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Unitarian Universalists come from a long line of heretics, people who dared to question religious teaching. So how do heresy and religious commitment go together?

September 28: *A Path to Purpose*

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Finding one's purpose, building a life of meaning and purpose, arises from commitment and engagement. It is what helps us connect to something larger than ourselves.

