

Living Our Dreams

October 15, 2017

First Unitarian Society of Plainfield

Rev. Ann Marie Alderman

If I didn't have the joy that comes from living with small children, and a spouse who loves me and forgives me no matter what, and purposeful work, I think I would be having longer and more frequent moments of worry and despair than I have had... since last November. This is a hard time for progressive people. It is hard time to be in what I like to think of as the third (and last) phase of my life, the last few years of working, the last few decades of living.

I am worried about the future, not just mine, or yours, but OURS.

Yet, I have hope.

I have hope because, like Robert Fulghum, the well-known and highly celebrated author and UU minister, wrote in [All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten](#);

"I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge. That myth is more potent than history. That dreams are more powerful than facts. That hope always triumphs over experience. That laughter is the only cure for grief. And I believe that love is stronger than death."



It is very clear to me that these words are not only important to remember now during this time in history, this time in my life, but during this time in this congregation's life. It is clear to me and I believe to our leaders now, that this congregation is facing a major transition, a major transition that will occur in the very near future. As with all transitions, there will be an ending and there will be also be a beginning. There will be sadness and grieving, lots of laughter and I am sure there will be LOVE.

Following this service, during the Town Hall meeting, you will hear the details of what the FUSP finances say about how much longer this congregation can afford to be housed in this building.

You will hear and you will be able to discuss what your options might be for staying here, for selling or for donating this building. Perhaps there is an entity beyond this congregation that can and will continue to serve the needs of the people of Plainfield, who can and will take on the upkeep and maintenance of this historic building.

Perhaps, your story as a congregation that began on a piece of Plainfield land donated by a government official, will end as this piece of land is given back to the city, to the mayor, to the government official in charge of receiving such a gift.

That will be a story about going full circle, about receiving and giving back.

Perhaps, the story will be; in your final years as a congregation, you gave what had always been an asset for the people of Plainfield back to the people of Plainfield. You gave back so that the mission of this congregation would live on beyond the congregation's life.

It could also be your story that as this congregation is today, it will be tomorrow, remaining right here, yet housed in a building it no longer owns, unburdened from that responsibility, free to pursue its mission without worrying about the roof, the walls, the floors. Enjoying the space as the new landlord deems fit, continuing to serve from here as best it can without the burdens of ownership for as long as it can.

Perhaps, the First Unitarian Society will separate from this building. And someday congregants will tell the story of when they used to be here, but now are there.... A people rooted here, but having found new life just a few miles away.

Whatever the future may bring, it is clear is that this congregation is in transition. It is clear, that this transition can be as any transition can be, an opportunity for spiritual growth.

I used to be a chaplain in a large hospital with a very active Trauma Center. It was hard, but it was so worthwhile. Being present with people, with families, that were experiencing transitions was my role. Often the transitions seemed sudden and dramatic. Yet there was usually also an ingredient of established patterns, patterns that could be altered when the circumstances were right for that. As a chaplain I was not there to "save" people. I was there to carry news from the medical arena to families, to comfort, and to pay close attention to when a door might be opening that might allow the sudden life changing event to effect a needed "adjustment". That could mean a difference in family dynamics, or a change in habits, or a change that might cause family members to verbalize something that had long gone unsaid.

So, one could say that my job was to help people believe in the power of imagination, storytelling, dreams, hope, laughter and love. To help make a transition better than it might otherwise have been.

So, using some of what I learned as a chaplain, I am going to ask you to imagine with me, what will be going on for First Unitarian 5 years from now.

Can you see this congregation in another space on a Sunday morning in mid-October 2022? Can you imagine lots of young children and their parents filling the room a mile or two away from here? Will those young parents be building relationships with each other that can last through the years of raising those young children and beyond? Perhaps you can see the young men we

“bridged” last spring back in the fold with their spouses and the child they are about to birth, then dedicate, then raise within this congregation.

Might it be 5 years from today that First Unitarian is readying itself to call their next full-time minister? Will FUSP be working on a capital campaign that follows that minister’s joyous installation? Will the day come soon after that when the minister and the congregation move into their new home, the one they have been dreaming about building, a new home made possible by the sale of this building?

Or might you tell a story to yourself about what it will be like 5 years from now, when this building has been transformed by the new owners who came in some 4 years ago today (today, mid-October 2022). Share with me how the old FUSP building continued to be a landmark location in Plainfield where those in need found help. Tell me about how the inspiring words, music, songs that nightly filled this sanctuary, the theatre pieces that lit up the Parish Hall, the memories that were made in the classrooms have still been changing lives.

Tell me how the citizens of Plainfield are meeting here to talk out their differences, to eat together, to tell the story of how this healing space became what it now is in 2022. Share with me how everyone who comes into this space is told the story of how the land was given to a church, the church built a building, and then the church gave it back... land, building and all.

Imagination and dreams are more important than facts. So, talk to me about beloved community, about open doors, about smiling faces, about warm welcomes. Talk to me about how it was the wish of a modest people, a people of lesser numbers, a tired people, how it was their wish to be generous with what they had long thought of as their best asset, to let it go in order to continue to be committed to their principles, to make a difference...how they choose to give some say beyond their means... to make a difference...

Tell me how they leapt into being who they had always hoped to be, how they continued a legacy that gave them life, so that they could give others life.

Together they used the time they still had with each other, to love each other and to dream beyond themselves.

Looking back to this time 5 years from now our experience will say it was hard times. Hate was winning. The elders were going without. Greatness was diminishing. The planet was angry. Gun toting loners were destroying lives. Lush, beautiful places were being stripped bare. Homes that people cared about, lived in, that held their dreams were being destroyed by water, wind, fire. There was darkness and heat that could not be kept at bay. There was so little left to feel good about.

It was as if, still alive, but at our own memorial services, we were grieving the passing of our own lives...that soon would be no more forever. Then we realized we had something of value to give to make the future better than it might be without us.

We can't go back to what used to be, but is no more. The way forward is forward. The only way is to the other side, to the future, is to move through our feelings of sorrow and grief, with love and laughter and hope, until we get to tomorrow.

Hope will be born from feeling proud, from feeling good, from feeling generous, knowing that today will bring tomorrow.

What will tomorrow bring? We can't know for sure. We don't claim to know.

What we can know is that our imagination, our dreams, our love and our laughter will give us and others the hope we need to get there.

Beloved, I have been here toiling as your developmental minister for a year, pushing you to pay attention to the financial realities of a shrinking congregation in an aging building that needs more and more of the resources you will soon no longer have to draw down. Now your leaders are seeing this reality as well and are taking up that role of pushing you to deal with it. So, I won't be pushing you anymore.

Now, in this my second year with you, my role is to be present with you as you grieve, as you move past denial, as perhaps you attempt to bargain the inevitable away, (and I will hear that as grieving) and as you come to rest in acceptance of whatever comes next. I will be here to help you grieve and to celebrate and to create a legacy.

Whatever comes next fueled by your imagination, the story you wish to tell, the laughter and tears and love that gets you through the night, will be whatever it is.

Whatever that story is you will be held in love.
