

"In Search of Tomorrow" ©
Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Madison, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd
March 1, 2020

Sounding of the Gong

Gathering Music *Pathétique Sonata, No. 2*, Beethoven Nick Stanford, Pianist

#Welcome Sue Schaedler, Vice President
Board of Trustees

Prelude *Tomorrow*, Strouse

Chalice Lighting Tony Ferraiola, 'Create Yourself' Founder
(*The flaming chalice is the symbol of our free faith*)

Opening Words Rev. Lloyd

For the past several weeks we have been challenged by a Chalice Quest to begin the practice of using a chalice at home to reflect together on life's significant moments. During this time our children, youth, adults, parents, seniors, everyone, has had a chance to create our own version of a giant chalice which we share with you today.

Present Big Chalice! Amy Buckley, DFF

This week's chalice words are from Isabel Allende¹

"Give, give, give – what is the point of having experience, knowledge or talent if I don't give it away? Of having stories if I don't tell them to others? Of having [money] if I don't share it. It is in giving that I connect with others, with the world and with the divine."

Your reflection today is "What are your gifts to the world?"

#*Opening Hymn 361 *Enter, Rejoice and Come In*
There are hymnals in the seats in front of you if you need them.

Story *The Tree of Life*, Lynn Gardner Kathy Helmrich

Offertory Words *March Share the Plate: Create Yourself* Tony Ferraiolo, Founder
Here, we share with generosity what treasure we have with others whose needs are greater than our own. Each week we donate half of our total cash offering to a non-

¹ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/isabel_allende_596871 February 29,2020

profit program that serves others. This month your cash contributions will go to "Create Yourself," an organization based in New Haven, founded by Tony Ferraiolo who is here today to share what it is his organization does.

Offering & Offertory Hymn *Answering the Call of Love, Shelton*

#Sing the Young People Out *Children's Recessional*
(please see back of hymnal)

Honoring Our Joys and Sorrows

In the coming moments, we will share with one another our joys and sorrows. We do so in two ways.

(1) You may come forward to the mic to speak (or, if needed we will can bring a mic to you).

(2) Afterwards, you may come forward to light a candle silently, if you prefer.

Verbal Expression

If there are those among us who would like to share their joy or sorrow from the microphone, please come forward now (or raise your hand as needed).

Silent Expression

And, now let us enter into a time of quiet reflection.

[Bell]

In this time let us slow down the pace of life, see past the distractions, and pay attention to that which, perhaps, you've been too busy to notice. It could be a joy, it could be sorrow, it could be something with which you are struggling . . .

In these moments, ground your feet on the floor (as you are able), relax your body . . . breathe deeply. Reflect in silence on that voice longing to be heard . . . acknowledge it . . .

As the spirit moves you, you may come forward to light a candle for that which is on your mind or in your heart.

Musical Meditation *Children's Corner: The Little Shepherd, Debussy*

Let us remember with reverence the joys and sorrows spoken and unspoken today.

[Bell]

Reflection

In Search of Tomorrow

Rev. Lloyd

As you know, today is our Pledge Drive Kick-Off. Now you may think of pledge drives in merely functional terms, as in collecting money for a budget. But, I don't think about our stewardship efforts that way. I think of our pledge drives as the crucible in which our dreams as a congregation can blossom. There is a certain alchemy that goes on with good pledge drives. In the best of circumstances there is a pairing of what we dream for each other and this congregation and what we offer, with others, to make that dream come true. It is a communal act, and by that act we make much more than the sum of the parts.

PAUSE

How many of you remember watching *"The Wonderful World of Disney"* when you were growing up? Raise your hands. Do you remember the theme song? *"When You Wish Upon A Star?"* It was first used in Disney's 1940 story of Pinocchio, a puppet that longs to break the strings that control him, and to become a real boy who loves and lives. And, then . . . along comes a blue fairy, that tells him that he can have his dream, if he *proves* himself to be 'brave, truthful, and unselfish.'²

The key word here is the word, "proves". As in he would be tested by a "host of unsavory characters" and circumstances. As in, it would not be easy. It would not come naturally. He would have to change . . . grow . . . become different than how he understood himself to be. He may have his dream, but only after he runs the gamut of known and unknown obstacles that prevent him from simply grabbing it for the taking.

Dreams don't work that way, do they? You see, the story is not really about getting what you want, but about striving for it. It is about the very human yearning, hoping, dreaming, reaching to become more than we are today. This human characteristic of hoping to live into our fullest potential . . . to become the fullest most complete expression of ourselves . . . it taps the shoulder of all of us at one point or another. It is the great motivator for some of our most challenging sacrifices we make, in the name of a dream that we can't quite reach, but can imagine in the distance.

² [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinocchio_\(1940_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinocchio_(1940_film)) March 1, 2020

I ask you to think back in time to when you knew nothing about this congregation. It may even have been a time when you knew nothing about Unitarian Universalism. Think about who you were then, your life circumstances, your struggles, your dreams.

PAUSE

I don't know if your need was met in its entirety by this congregation, or another. But, I hope that since you still come, that there is some part of yourself that finds that this congregation somehow feeds your heart, your mind, your soul. And yet, it may surprise you when I say that it is my dream for you that you never achieve completely your fullest potential, fulfillment, and expression. Why would I say that? Because I believe that it is in the striving that we live, in the striving that we reach, in the striving we hope, in the striving we become what might never have been expected, and, it is in the striving that we eclipse that which we imagined . . . and then go further. It is in the striving that together we make community that is more than the sum of its parts.

PAUSE

Last night, over 50 of our members came together for our Chili Pledge Dinner Kick Off. I asked them to answer this question: ***"What are the things you appreciate about this congregation?"*** (The answers are not ranked ordered or ordered into themes. I present them to you as they were relayed to me.)

The answers were:

- The People! (community)
- *Friendship & Kindness – I appreciate our great minister and the location of our church building, coffee time, visiting (Kathy Helmrich speaking)*
- We are a small, loving, caring, and giving church
- A home for the spirit
- You can come as you are
- Community
- *The minister! (Kathy Helmrich)*
- Good community
- Interesting & inspiring services
- Having a community with broad interests, backgrounds and spirituality
- The ability to express beliefs freely, knowing all are accepted
- *The minister is a confident leader (Kathy Helmrich)*
- A friendly congregation
- An intellectually curious congregation
- Having a place to meet with people of similar thoughts/views of life.
- Community and prompting thoughts beyond self and own life (a bigger picture)

- It's friendly, cares about society & nature
- Being with like-minded people
- A time each week to be in reflection
- Men's group
- I've made good friends
- Music
- Community; good, fun, support, thought provoking conversation
- Friendship
- This liberal faith
- Warmth, care, and friendliness of congregation
- A community of liberal thinkers whose views I share
- The different generations in the church
- The energy of the children and young families
- The healthy environment for my family
- Consistent support structure
- Great conversations
- COMMUNITY
- Community – like a family
- Community
- Good works**
- Spirituality
- Inspirational sermons
- Interaction with different people, young and old, with different occupations and interests
- Music
- Community feeling
- Singing
- Friendliness
- Strong feeling of community
- The services, especially when they're spiritual
- A warm family feeling
- Community – the people and relationships I have with others here.
- Our small group ministry listening circles
- People are warm and inviting
- The principles
- The fellowship of like thinking persons
- Support of each other
- Willingness to step up where needed

- I don't feel like a stranger. Plus, I knew Rev. Jeanne when she was at my old church.
- The people
- The learned new thoughts
- Positive ideas
- Meeting new people
- The people, the vibe, the caring community
- The community gatherings and events
- Some Sunday Services
- Good community
- Our Unitarian Universalist approach
- The People
- The people who are the heart of the congregation
- People/Friends
- Music
- Being fully accepted into a community that holds my dearest thoughts very sacred – the interconnectedness of the Universe.
- Seeing that the children matter so much – it enriches my day and week
- Connections to our community of members & friends.
- The slow as molasses improvements
- Nick
- Amy

And, when asked ***What positive changes they'd seen in the last 10 years (or since their arrival if they were newer)***, they said:

- Music that is being integrated beautifully with new singers with great energy.
- A willingness of all of us to address what is not working at SUUS
- A growing membership
- *Very happy to have an attentive, caring, full-time minister (Kathy Helmrich)*
- I love having the children in the intergenerational services
- Men's group
- *Great new minister, building renovations (new chairs in the meeting room!) (Kathy Helmrich)*
- Nick as pianist
- More music
- *Current minister! (Jeanne) (Kathy Helmrich)*
- More people stepping up to volunteer
- Full-time minister

- Good board
- Building & parking lot in best shape
- *I came in 1995. We have a very good minister now. (Kathy Helmrich)*
- Reinvigorated religious education. The young people get a good start.
- *Minister (Kathy Helmrich)*
- Building improvement
- Full time minister
- Building
- Increase in membership
- Going to full time ministry
- Dramatic increase in budget
- Though I haven't been here long, I understand that the leadership has been more open to new ideas, i.e. promoting ourselves
- Improvements to the building inside & out!
- Music (Amy & Nick)
- Sharing the plate
- I think the board leadership may have loosened up some
- Improvement in the quality of Worship Services
- Sharing the plate
- We've improved the music greatly and I approve
- Music Director and pianist
- Improved building
- New Members
- We are getting along better overall
- Despite glitches, it is running smoother
- Childcare is more consistent
- Building renovations
- Leadership is more predictable
- More young families
- More of a bent toward spirituality
- I am glad 'God' can be said in the church now – it's no longer taboo
- The addition of Amy – music and Faith Formation
- The Faith Formation program is being updated
- Better music
- Better ministry
- Better pastoral care
- Building improvements
- Enjoying the new building
- The changes are good – getting new people

- Enhanced music
- The new Faith Formation program has strengthened our old religious education program and there is greater incorporation of youth in the services
- Care for the facility/building
- Professionalization of conditions for the staff
- Beautiful new chairs and sanctuary
- The beach service!
- Full-time ministry
- Relative harmony!
- Strong music and music director
- Better and stronger organizational structure with policies and stronger Board
- Looking for ways to support community social justice
- Pursuing greater inclusion of people with unique abilities
- Full time ministry
- Empowered Worship Committee
- More young families
- Great music
- Transitioning from Sunday Services

Now, let's move a bit further along this continuum of naming our dreams. I asked them this two-part question:

"When you think about this congregation, how much it's grown and what it needs for the full expression of its principles and potential, what are your dreams for it now? What's the first thing you would do, if you could just wave a wand, and make it come true?"

Those gathered together last night wrote:

Dreams for SUUS:

- A larger congregation with larger building.
- Financial sustainability
- A stained glass window behind the pulpit.
- Financial stability
- More new people involved with the church, new people equals new ideas
- A beautiful stained glass window behind the pulpit.
- The creation of a true spiritual home for people with disabilities
- Widen the congregation to share the spirit and the cost
- More pledges to give a comfortable financial margin each year
- A Full-time Faith Formation Director

- More harmony
- Double the size of the congregation
- If I had a magic wand, our racial diversity would be closer to 50% people of color
- More people at our services
- More help with youth
- More money
- Build a new/expanded building before our numbers warrant it. "If you build it they will come."
- To be a more visible option on the shoreline.
- To expand the congregation to include people who are in their hearts UUs (but who perhaps don't know it yet)
- One says, "Let the future evolve, don't force it."
- Have people learn more about other members
- A more diverse congregation
- To be known as a positive force in the community
- Get agreement on our mission
- More money and members
- Intentional institutional focus on membership growth
- More young families to carry on SUUS as the congregation ages
- More advertising to draw more visitors and members
- More accessible – no stairs!
- More young families joining
- More outreach at venues where young families are
- Bigger congregation, more diverse, younger
- Bigger or different endowment so we can pay proper staff salaries
- Self-sustaining church
- Greater visibility in the community
- If I had a wand, we'd win the "lotto"
- Evening activities from 5-8 pm
- More time for me to learn more about the Unitarian faith
- Clearing the property and utilizing it better
- Sing more often – more hours for Amy to build the choir, otherwise keep things about the same
- CHANGE THE NAME
- Greater representation on committees by congregants
- Financial stability
- Growth to 150+ members
- Serious community representation at fundraisers
- To not be dipping into the endowment on a regular basis

- To make everyone in the congregation understand & agree to not dip into the endowment on a regular basis
- More friends/members to share Unitarian Universalism with . . . enlarge our community
- Continued and increased engagement of people at SUUS
- Pay off bills
- Find more of US
- No more using the endowment!!
- Daytime activities because I do not drive at night, i.e. Senior lunches out and small group ministries to discuss life and lifestyles
- That SUUS becomes more widely attended
- That the SUUS building be a community center for nonprofit initiatives: Buddhist groups, AA, reading groups, children's groups (not necessarily run by us)
- That the minister have more time to do more public ministry on justice issues
- Welcoming people who are flowing in the doors
- More sharing
- More Sunday Services reflecting a greater diversity in the congregation
- Even more intelligent, spiritually based sermons
- Growth
- Consistent Services
- Greater diversity in the congregation
- Active growth
- Diversity that includes people of color, Muslims, Hindus, atheists, Catholics, Hebrews.
- Diverse membership – although I know that is hard given the demographics of the shoreline area
- More money so that we don't need to reduce staff or programs
- To grow to at least 200 or more
- That people contribute their time and talent even more

And, finally, our members were asked this question. ***What are your dreams for Unitarian Universalism, at large?***

- The exploration and acceptance of all people; staying present; more prayer; even Jesus some times
- Recognized at a national level
- More activism from supporting local efforts like the ABC house to international efforts to stop the separation of children from parents at the US Southern border
- That Unitarian Universalism grow in numbers and influence
- That it work with other denominations to promote world peace

- For it to be as well known as other majority faiths
- That all who are in search of a faith tradition like Unitarian Universalism find this faith
- For this faith to be known by all citizens
- To be understood by other religions; not seen as a cult
- To have a positive impact in the world
- More recognition, being a player at the religious table
- Expand Unitarian Universalism's reach as influencers – not necessarily to get more members but to support social justice issues and outreach in the community, such as soup kitchens, schools, homeless support, etc.
- More visibility
- Higher profile among general public. So many UU's don't know it.
- Greater visibility in the US & Europe
- That it had more members and a greater political impact
- More diversity
- Figure out how Unitarian Universalism can be more welcoming to people of color
- Attract people who have given up their old religion.
- Greater visibility at a national level, especially for our principles
- A uniform service for all Unitarian Universalists
- Greater diversity
- To infuse all religions with tolerance
- To grow the national membership and the contributions of time and talent of all Unitarian Universalists

PAUSE

Remember that children's song I mentioned at the beginning, *"When You Wish Upon A Star"*? It's a very hopeful song, full of idealism. But, let's not underestimate the invisible forces that really help children and grownups, reach for their dreams. To be sure, faith in your dreams is important, and a little help from fate can't hurt, but the thing that really makes it possible for people to reach for their dreams is the tangible support and guidance we offer each other and this congregation. The connection that says, *"Your dreams are important to me, and mine to you. Our dreams are important! What will we do to help make them real?"* When we gather in community, and work together in community, to live by our ideals and to share our dreams, we help others in search of their dreams. It is by the sanctuary we create in our connections with one another that we provide the safe space for all of us to risk the unknown. Any change, is an unknown, and therefore can feel risky. Thus, any change asked of us presents unexpected challenges. It's much easier to stay the same than it is to change. But, when we provide tangible support to each other and this congregation we become that crucible whereby others can not only entertain the possibility of risking change, but

where a community like SUUS can have the confidence to pursue healthy and transformative risks.

Will we get precisely to where we think we want to go? I don't know. We may get to someplace better! What I do know is that now is the time to continue to move forward, based on the strong foundation we've already established. Now is time to experiment boldly, to keep experimenting, to keep learning from our mistakes, all the while moving in the direction of dreams that may morph and change beyond what our expectations are today.

Now is the time to put our collective shoulders to the wheel and move in the direction of our personal dreams and our shared dreams for this congregation, and for Unitarian Universalism. Now is the time to offer our best so that other's lives may be enriched, as ours have been. The children and people of tomorrow are depending on us. Let us grow into who we were always meant to be. Let us pursue risk, and provide the loving support to each other to do so as well.

Now, I need to ask a favor of you. I'm not the best singer, but I'm willing to risk singing this song, if you will sing it with me? Let's sing together . . . "When You Wish Upon a Star."

When You Wish Upon a Star³, by Cliff Edwards, Paul Smith

(Key of F)

When you wish upon a star
Makes no difference who you are
Anything your heart desires
Will come to you

If your heart is in your dream
No request is too extreme
When you wish upon a star
As dreamers do

Faith is kind
She brings to those she loves

3

https://www.google.com/search?q=to+whom+much+was+given%2C+of+him+much+will+be+required%2C&rlz=1C1GGGE_enUS512US514&oq=to+whom+much+was+given%2C+of+him+much+will+be+required%2C&aqs=chrome..69i57&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8#q=lyrics%20to%20when%20you%20wish%20upon%20a%20star 3/1/20

The sweet fulfillment of
Their secret longing

Like a bolt out of the blue
Fate steps in and sees you through
When you wish upon a star
Your dreams come true.

I close with these words from Jessica Lin⁴

"This haven, this refuge, this place of worship and wonder exists because [together] we make it so, with . . . the gifts of our time, our skills, our food, our love, our laughter, and our money."

[Show my pledge Letter]

Please join me in giving, so that we may continue to have a place that fortifies and challenges us in these trying and troubled times.

May it be so. Thank you.

***Hymn 1028** *Fire of Commitment*

***Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice**

In this season of flu and respiratory illnesses, instead of joining hands, I invite you to touch elbows as you are willing.

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. We extinguish this flame but not the flame of community that nurtures our spirit and encourages us to grow beyond who we are today. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Let the congregation say, Amen.

Please remain standing and face each other to sing our closing song, From You I Receive. The words are very simple, yet profound. We will sing it twice through.

Closing Song 402 *From You I Receive*

Silent Reflection

Let us sit together in silence as we absorb the message and meaning of today's service.

⁴ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/offering/we-make-it-possible> February 29, 2020