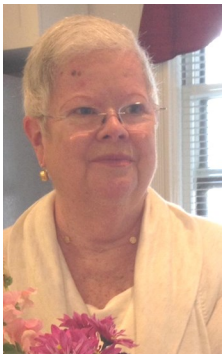


# the steeple

*The Congregational Newsletter of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington*  
November 2017

## Thoughts on Abundance

*By Rev. Phyllis B. O'Connell, Sabbatical Minister*



What do we mean by abundance? Typically we think of it as being synonymous with plenty or having a surplus or far more of something than is needed. Fall's harvest and gathering season bring to mind abundance. Still, it's always startling to me to remember there are over 7,000 varieties of apples. Is there a better example of nature's bounty?

When I think of abundance, my mind often goes to the opening words of America the Beautiful: "For beautiful and spacious skies and amber waves of grain." We mostly think of abundance as something positive, even majestic, such as purple mountains. But that's not always true. Texas, Florida and a number of Caribbean islands suffer still from hurricanes that brought too much rain. The Santa Rosa area of California is recovering from too much wind that resulted in tragic fires.

So maybe a better understanding of abundance would be simply having enough. Yet this concept runs counter to our consumer society that depends on our believing that we never seem to have nearly enough of anything. Estimates differ but at least one research firm claims the average person sees or hears or, in some way, is exposed to approximately 5,000 advertisements a day.

We like to think we're not very susceptible to individual ads, and maybe we're not, but how can we not inadvertently absorb the overall message

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## *Thoughts on Abundance*

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that somehow we are missing out? In browsing Facebook for about a minute, the following ads appeared: Easy Bag Bungee, Chloe, Road Scholar, Viking Cruises, J. McLaughlin and Norwegian Airlines. I've never bought, booked, sailed or flown on any one of them. And that's just perusing Facebook for about 60 seconds which, of course, doesn't include any of the seemingly thousands of ads that clutter email and appear daily on television, radio, and in print media.

It's said that what we think is what we see. It makes sense that if we think we don't have enough, it's all too easy to find proof that we don't. That proof is everywhere. Gosh, that Lexus looks good and that large Victorian on "House Hunters" is attractive and a cruise on the Danube might well be really lovely, but those luxury items are all out of my reach and maybe yours, too. So, we have a choice: we can feel deprived wanting what we don't have or we can appreciate all that we do have. If we have enough, we are fortunate, and we are even more fortunate to realize that enough is plenty.

The writer Geoffrey Gluckman captures a sensible approach to abundance when he says: "Live from abundance, utilize with economy and share in advance."

## *From the FUUSB Board of Trustees*

*By Todd Clason, Trustee-At-Large*

It's been warm for longer than usual this year, but autumn is finally in the air, and you may notice that some of the name tags you see moving about the Parlors after the service have turned orange. Sometimes it's important to stick out in crowd and be noticed, and that's what the current members of the First UU Society Board of Trustees are trying to do. If you're curious about our ongoing visioning work, look for the dash of color attached to a friendly board member, and take a moment to connect.

Many changes have happened in our UU Society over a fairly short amount of time, which may feel somewhat disconcerting. If we embrace this change, however, perhaps it is an opportunity for spiritual growth and deeper connection. Early next year, we will be actively seeking out your take on the future of our Society, but it's never too early to start the conversation. Enjoy the crisp air and color of fall!



### **FUUSB Board of Trustees**

Front row, left to right: Dan House, *Vice President*; Tracy Titchner, *President*; Todd Clason; Debby Bergh.  
Back row, left to right: Henry Schek; Rosanne Greco; Louis DeRosset, *Secretary*; Todd Schlossberg, *Secretary*; Marla Emery.

## Introducing the Solidarity and Sanctuary Team

*By Andre Mol, Ministerial Intern*



In my first year as your intern, just a few months after I started, we witnessed our Muslim neighbors receive hate mail. We responded with a number of other faith communities in the state by traveling to the mosque for their Friday prayer service

and delivering love letters. Then, we witnessed the targeted arrest of migrant worker activists by ICE. Our own Rev. Mara was one of the interfaith clergy who traveled to Boston for the deportation hearings of these individuals. Many of you have asked, what more can we do to be in solidarity with individuals in our community who are being targeted in these ways?

In response, FUUSB is forming a new Solidarity and Sanctuary Team. As an effort of solidarity, the team intends to create personal relationships with members of other area faith communities irrespective of the differences in our traditions and beliefs, so that we are ready and able to provide mutual moral and material support in times of need. Regarding sanctuary, there is wide consensus that physical sanctuary is not a need in our area. However, there may be a role for the First UU Society in offering emotional and spiritual sanctuary for Vermont's migrant workers. Migrant Justice is Vermont's connection with the migrant worker community, and best knows the need. One way to assist our migrant population might be to participate in Vermont Interfaith Action's (VIA) work with Migrant Justice.

In addition to questions about specific actions of solidarity and sanctuary, I have encountered other

questions in my conversations with many of you and members of our community. When we show up to witness or speak out against an act of hate, how do we show up as friends and community members instead of as strangers? Can forming a deeper knowledge of our interfaith community be an act of solidarity? How does learning about other faith traditions deepen our understanding of our own Unitarian Universalist tradition? We can't explore these questions on our own, and we can't explore them through a one-time event. So this team will sponsor activities and events throughout the year to begin this exploration.

I wish I could say we are not going to witness more actions of hate and oppression in our community. But we are aware of the hard reality that these forces exist and we must join others in the struggle against them. With the formation of this team and the activities and events associated with it, we deepen the relationships we need to create the world we dream about.

If you would like to get involved or have ideas about activities this team can sponsor, please reach out to me at [andre@uusociety.org](mailto:andre@uusociety.org).

### Daylight Saving Time Reminder

**Remember to set your clocks  
back one hour on Saturday night,  
November 4.**

**Daylight saving time  
ends at 2 a.m. on  
Sunday, November 5.**





## *From the Stewardship Team* **Faith in the Abundance Within and Around Us**

*By Gene Bergman*

One of our fundamental values at the First UU Society of Burlington is “Respect,” by which we mean, “engaging all with kindness, understanding and mutual respect as faithful democratic stewards of all we hold dear.” November’s theme of Abundance reminds us that we have enough and are enough to live this value and be faithful stewards of the FUUSB.

We are called to have faith in the abundance all around us.

It takes so much to do the work of this Society, to minister to ourselves and the world. And extraordinary times call us to do extraordinary things. But we have shown time and time again that we have what we need and that we graciously and generously give what we can. Our history tells us that we have and will answer the call of love and justice time and time again, with gratitude and dedication.

Look at what we’ve done: hiring Rev. Mara, growing the congregation, adopting year one of the staffing vision budget, opening our doors to the community in times of need and celebration. Our mission calls us to inspire spiritual growth, care for each other and our community, seek truth, and act for justice. Look at the ministries we’ve built: RE and OWL, small group ministries, theme circles, choirs, a community chorus, the Care Network, book groups, membership and women’s spirituality teams, and the Labyrinth; the property, garden and sanctuary teams; the finance and planned giving teams; the safety, healthy congregation, nominating, and endowment fund teams; the Mother



Up! gatherings, the Racial Justice and Economic Justice task forces, Solidarity & Sanctuary and Love & Justice Vigil teams, and the board.

The abundant stores of resources the members of this Society have tapped have allowed us to align gratitude with generosity. Giving has allowed us to be true to our mission and live out our values.

We also have shown an abundance of sensibility and commitment to sustainability. We recognize that we have done all this with a staff stretched to the limit. This, too, reveals the deep abundance of care we have for the people we call on to do the daily and overarching work of our Society. We accept the clear and unavoidable truth that the work we are called on to do is unsustainable with our staff structure and that without change, Rev. Mara and the rest of the people we rely on will crack.

We embraced the responsibility to be better stewards, head-on, creating a staffing vision and a three-year financial plan to sustainably and equitably answer this call of Love and Justice. Last spring, we rose with our hearts and souls and pledged the funds to embrace this vision and then passed Year One of this Vision Budget. We dug deep into our wellsprings and answered the call of Love and Justice. The gratitude that beamed off of Rev. Mara’s

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and Christina's smiling faces was a reflection of the Love we shared.

These continue to be extraordinary times. Our ministries are vibrant and the world calls us. It calls us to continue to believe, to have faith in the knowledge that we have great gifts to share. These are gifts of time. They are gifts of wisdom. They are gifts of craft and skill and sweat, and even tears. They are gifts of money.

Now, in Year Two of the staffing vision, it is time to mobilize ourselves. Again.

November is a time to reflect on all we really do have, the abundance all around and within us. It is a time to know that we all have a part to play, and a time to remember that we have enough to play that part.

It is also time to remember the specifics of our vision and our commitment. A commitment for a Second Minister—a Minister of Congregational Life; a commitment for a Youth & Young Adult Ministry Coordinator to better serve high school, college, and young adults in the congregation; a commitment to hire a Director of Community Engagement to grow membership services and engagement, and connections with the larger community; and a commitment to hire the staff needed to ease the management burdens on Rev. Mara and Christina.

We hope you'll join us on this spiritual journey. To see the gifts you have to give. To know those gifts are needed, are cherished, are honored. To have faith in the knowledge that we have so much more than we think we have. To have faith in ourselves and each other.

Have a good November.



## **Joint Urban Ministry Project (JUMP) and Thanksgiving**

*By Woody Fulton, JUMP Treasurer*

JUMP's mission is "to promote the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of people by providing spiritual care, direct assistance to meet basic needs, and advocacy." First UU supports JUMP directly through our budget, and our annual bag drive goes a long way toward meeting those "basic needs" of our neighbors who find themselves in immediate difficulty. Bags will be distributed this year on Sunday, November 5.

JUMP was initiated in 1988 with a bequest from the estate of Nathan Johnson, specifically intended to help local people in need. In 1989, the founding downtown members of JUMP were the First United Methodist Church, the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, College Street Congregational Church, First Congregational Church, and the First Baptist Church. Soon, several additional congregations joined as sponsors of JUMP: Christ Church Presbyterian, the First Unitarian Universalist Society, and the Essex Junction Congregational Church.

As the Nathan Johnson Trust diminished, new funding sources for JUMP were sought. Supporting congregations pooled their resources to provide funds for direct service and to staff JUMP. Other sources of funding have included: the COTS Cropwalk, Run for the O.N.E., Presbytery of Northern New England, the Feinstein Foundation, the Every Monday Thrift Shop, the Sisters of Mercy,

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## **Joint Urban Ministry Project (JUMP) and Thanksgiving**

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alternative Christmas giving programs, businesses, individual donations, and memorial gifts. Additionally, thousands of dollars are given to JUMP annually through the “material” donations given by members of the sponsoring congregations: non-perishable foods, cleaning supplies, toilet paper, and personal hygiene items. Vouchers are donated by the Possibility Shop of First Congregational Church, and the Every Monday Thrift Shop.

Since the early 1990s JUMP has been housed at First Congregational Church of Burlington. Office and storage space, utilities, cleaning and photocopying are donated by FCCB.

JUMP is staffed by two paid employees and many volunteers. First UU currently counts at least seven active or past active volunteers who have served

at the drop-in center and/or as board members or officers of JUMP. Each Thanksgiving season since the early 1990s, First UU has conducted a food bag drive for JUMP. Grocery bags are distributed, and we are asked to return the bags the Sunday before Thanksgiving, filled from a list of basic grocery items or basic toiletry items. The items are sorted, a group of strong volunteers loads vans and trunks and hauls everything to First Congregational, and then upstairs to a storage area. First UU has for years been the supplier of the greatest number of filled bags; last year we collected over 190 badly needed and greatly appreciated bags.

Thank you, everyone, for your support and generosity. Let's make this a record year!

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