

I have subscribed to the Christian Science Monitor since my early 20's. It is one of my regular sources for news and in-depth reporting. The Monitor makes it a point to report on what is hopeful as well as the bad news with which we are inundated. One of the regular features in the Monitor is a 1-1/2 page article on someone, somewhere, who is making a difference. Here is one of those persons.

Kathleen Cronan is the executive director of the nonprofit Earthlinks in Denver. The mission of Earthlinks is to serve homeless and other marginalized persons and help the planet. "People relearn their personal dignity here," says Kathleen, through involvement in organic gardening and creation of eco-friendly products. Participants receive a modest stipend. Says Anna Herzberg, a 40-year old woman, after a morning of mulching the garden, "Before this, I was very isolated, and didn't have community or anyone too count on." The article finishes with a quote by Kathleen, who sounds very UU (I don't know if she is or isn't). "People [who are or have been homeless] should not be treated like lepers because they do not happen to have all of the opportunities that others have had for various reasons," she says. "We are all a part of the same species, and we all bring our gift to the table."ⁱ

I enjoy these articles. They give truth to the statement by Margaret Mead, the quote in our OOS, that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. I am also bothered by them. Whether true or not, some of these articles portray the featured individuals as Lone Rangers. They have people helping, but those people are in the shadows. It is the force of their will alone that appears to bringing about the change they seek. That is not what we are talking about here. We are talking about our church. All of us. Bringing about change together.

Let's talk about mission and vision.

We have a mission and vision statement that were drafted in 2003. These were published in our October newsletter. I'll read them now.

Mission Statement: The mission of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Chico is to serve our community by welcoming all, supporting religious freedom and practice, encouraging spiritual and intellectual growth, and being actively involved in social action, all within the framework of Unitarian Universalist Principles.

Vision: In the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Chico, people find encouragement for spiritual exploration, inspiration for social involvement, and acceptance. Our community is characterized by diversity and open thinking, is nurtured by shared ministry, and is inspired by trained Unitarian Universalist leadership as well as a physical environment of warmth and beauty.

When I met with Angela to plan this service, she pointed out to me that there were additional draft Mission and Vision statements that were created in 2010 in a workshop with Sydney Wilde. Angela estimated that 1/3 of the members were present. These statements are available for viewing on the bookshelf on the north wall of the Fellowship Hall. At the risk of creating confusion, here's how they read:

Draft Mission Statement: The UUFC is a community dedicated to honoring the worth and dignity of all people. It is a community which promotes the open discussion and teaching of spiritual values and ethical practices. It is a compassionate congregation which cares for its members and the larger community.

Draft Vision Statement: The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Chico strives to be a growing community of open hearts and open minds, seeking truth and meaning as we live our spiritual values.

What are mission and vision statements? I went online to check. Our mission statement should explain our reason for being. Both our 2003 and 2010 mission statements do this. In 2003 we said "we serve our community...within the framework of UU Principles." In 2010 we said we care compassionately for our members and the larger community. There are differences in words and emphasis, but at their roots, both of these statements are about service, to each other and in the larger community, be that Chico, our region, our country or the world.

I am not here to advocate for one of these mission statements over the other. I think they both have their pluses and minuses. Crafting a mission statement is a task that can easily become a mission in itself, taking endless time and resources to finally arrive at something that we mostly agree on. Both our 2003 and our draft 2010 statements are good and useful.

What about a vision statement? A vision statement should describe our church as we want it to be at some point in the future. Our 2003 statement

described how we wanted to be internally: encouraging, accepting, diverse. We inspired social involvement. We shared ministry but were led by a UU minister. We worshiped in a physical environment of warmth and beauty. In the years since 2003 we have built a sanctuary and called me as your minister. We share ministry. We are generally accepting and encouraging. These parts of that vision statement are complete. We seek diversity, but this is an ongoing struggle for us, as with most UU congregations. What I wish to zero in on here is social involvement.

But first I will speak briefly about our 2010 draft vision. In that vision we seek to be a growing community as we live our spiritual values. That is fine, with a caveat. My intern supervisor, the Rev. Chris Bell, leads the Santa Rosa congregation. He gave the sermon at my ordination last week, and spoke about mission and vision. The Santa Rosa congregation has grown steadily since Chris was called about 10 years ago. It is now approaching 400 people. Yet Chris never talks about growth. Growth is not the goal, it is a by-product of that church living its mission, (which reads Celebrating Life, Empowering People, Caring for One Another, Building a Better World.)

Chris has good company in not targeting growth. Others have written extensively about how mission needs to be the driving force behind the life of a congregation. Pastor Rick Warren is one of these authors. His book, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission*, has been recommended to me by several UU mentors. I am making my way through it. Although he writes from the perspective of an evangelical Christian, there is much that is applicable to any church, synagogue, mosque or ashram. How many of you remember the 1989 movie *Field of Dreams*? Paraphrasing slightly, that movie had a line in it: "Build it and they will come." That's what we are talking about here. And I don't mean specifically this lovely sanctuary, although it helps. What I mean is an environment that is meaningful to people. Build it and they will come.

Why do people attend church? What keeps them coming back? According to John Dorhauer, president of the United Church of Christ and author of *Beyond Resistance: The Institutional Church Meets the Postmodern World*, people attend church for two reasons. They wish to be placed in the presence of something sacred and they wish to be engaged in something meaningful. For some of us the first reason is primary, although you may use a word other than sacred. For others

of us, engaging in something meaningful is of most importance. Perhaps both reasons weigh equally.

This brings me, at long last, to the title of this sermon, Living Our Mission Through Social Action. I propose that our social action is the meaningful thing that we engage in beyond our walls. Right now we engage in community action through our volunteering and financial support of the Torres Shelter. (say more) We will host Safe Space again this winter. (say more) We also have a prison ministry of writing letters.

But there is more that we can do. I understand from long time members that this fellowship used to be much more involved in social action. And circling back to the beginning of this sermon, what we do needs to be something that many of us agree on and can become involved with. What we do needs to be one or two additional things, so that we can be effective, so that we do not spread ourselves too thin. What we do needs to be something where we can make a discernible difference, otherwise it is easy to become discouraged.

What do we do? That is up to us to decide. All of us. I urge that we think about a social action that is environmentally related, although I will follow your lead. I know that there are many of us who are already involved in various environmental actions. Water is an issue that is important locally and throughout California in a variety of ways. The continued existence of salmon in our rivers is tied into water issues. Put on your thinking caps.

We are now going to ask that you write down some of your ideas for our social action priorities. (elaborate) With the social action committee, I will collate your responses and we will investigate possibilities. There will be opportunities for all of us to discuss these possibilities. In the not-too-distant future, all of us will select what one or two things we are going to add to our social action agenda to help live our mission of serving the community through our UU principles.

May it be so.

ⁱ David Karis. CSM, Oct 10, 2016. P 43