

Sermon May 4, 2008 “The Power of Vision”

“What a tragedy if even one melts away unwelcomed, only because we could not hear their dreams”... or because he or she could not hear ours. If one person fails to find the home she longs for because we do not reach out to her, because we are so poor in spirit that we keep our faith to ourselves, holding our little light close to our chests.

Or because we are so poor in resources that we have little to offer her and our unspoken message becomes, “Sorry, no room for you here.” What a tragedy if our vision fails to reach her because we are looking only inward, seeking only to survive, serving only one another; if our dreams are dull or uninspiring or timid. What a tragedy if we fail to grasp our power... our power to envision, to create, to make a difference to people we have yet to meet; to make a difference to the world.

We often hear that Unitarian Universalism, in words borrowed from more traditional faiths, has a “saving message.” It is a message of salvation, if you will, but salvation in this life.

It is a message of hope... Hope... and faith in our human ability to redeem the mistakes we have made, whether mistakes in how we treat the Earth, mistakes in how we treat our families and loved ones, mistakes in how we care for the stranger, the vulnerable, the hurting. A message of faith in our power as individuals and as communities to work together to change course, a message of the possibility of transformation.

Ours is message that human beings are inherently worthy, inherently lovable and deserving of respect and compassion, whoever they are. It’s a message of the power and responsibility of free thought... the saving message that reason and compassion must, and will, prevail.

Our saving message is that revelation is not sealed. That truth and understanding, mystery and meaning, are forever unfolding and that no one – not even ourselves – has a unique or exclusive claim on that truth.

Our message is that no one of us is alone. That we are connected in mystery and wonder, in mutual need and joy and accountability and love, to each other – to **all** others – and to the universe. Our message is that we embrace these connections and hold them sacred.

This is our message and this is our vision: that we will share this “good news” – because it is too good and too important to keep to ourselves. Because it truly is a message of power and of transformation.

A couple of weeks ago, I invited you to stay after our Sunday service to help put this vision into words. Six of you were willing to engage in this work. Now, I’m sure the rest of you had good reasons not to stay and talk. For one thing, it was a gorgeous

Sunday afternoon in spring! I don't blame you, truly. But this work is essential. If we don't have an articulated vision, we don't know where we are going. As the saying goes, if you don't know where you're going, any path will get you there. While this idea has a certain Zen appeal, it won't work for a church. A church needs to be a bit more proactive and self-aware. A church needs a vision if it is going to make wise choices about where to put its resources of time, talent and treasure. It needs a compass to keep it on course.

And so, we move to Plan B. Plan B is where I tell you what **my** vision is for this church and invite you to embrace it. And in fact, I think I do have a pretty good idea of what your vision is, based on our Appreciate Inquiry process and the UUCC Comprehensive Strategic Plan and on innumerable conversations with you, separately and in groups.

For we do hold a vision, each of us, apart and together, whether or not it is articulated, whether or not we even know what it is.

We each have the gift of imagination. Consciously or not, we each make certain assumptions about our future: we assume we will be successful, or not. We assume we will be lonely, or not. We assume we will be healthy, or ill; enjoying life or enduring it. And these assumptions have power to shape future reality. We make choices every day that act to confirm or challenge this vision of the future.

We do hold a vision collectively, as well. This church holds a vision, imagines a future. And this vision holds power. It has the power to determine our commitments.

Today, we celebrate our stewardship of this community, our stewardship of our vision of our future, our stewardship of the power we hold when we act together.

This congregation has made a huge investment in its future by moving to this current space. This move took money, courage and faith. We love this space, but it was never intended to be our permanent home.

Ask almost any one of you what your vision holds for this church, and almost all of you will answer, "We want to own our own church home." And I would respond, "Yes, but why? What do you plan to do with that church, in that church building?" And here are some of your answers and my answers to that question.

We want – and need – space. Space big enough to welcome a hundred and fifty or more people on a Sunday morning. Space that includes a social hall for all-church gatherings, and meeting rooms, plenty of classrooms for our children, a library. Space that we can open to the larger community. Perhaps space for a GLBT teen center or a thrift shop; space to provide overnight shelter to those in need of it. A building that we own can be made into a green building. We can have a garden and room for our kids to play, a place to meditate and socialize outdoors. A building of our own can be in a visible location; it can be accessible to public transportation; we can put up whatever

signs we want to let people know we are there. Those are just some of the reasons that owning our own building is part of our vision.

Our vision includes becoming a visible presence in Sacramento and Elk Grove. We want UUCC to be known as standing for the values of fairness, diversity and inclusiveness. My own vision is that we would be known as “the church that does the night ministry, or the church that does the prison ministry, or the church that feeds the hungry, or the church that helped build that affordable housing or the church that runs that halfway house.” These things take not just care and commitment – they take money and staff.

My vision includes a paid volunteer coordinator, a paid choir director, a full time office administrator and a paid membership coordinator.

My vision includes ministry in the form of programming for families in our church, for the elderly, for young adults. Chalice Circles, service groups, including a lay pastoral care team, book clubs and movie nights and weekly church dinners. It includes community outreach in the form of services to area children – after-school tutoring and mentoring, a drama group, an art group for kids and their parents.

And, of course, at the heart of my vision is a community that worships. A community that welcomes and honors diverse beliefs, that worships with music and the arts, that uses technology to enhance worship and reach out to the homebound. Worship that encourages and empowers members to explore their own spiritual gifts through participation. Worship that is welcoming, joyful, challenging and beautiful.

And, also at the heart of my vision is a community that loves its church, loves what it stands for and loves the people it. And that part of the vision is already a reality. It is the soul of this religious community. It is a great gift and one not to be taken lightly – or kept to ourselves. We have this love, this soulfulness, that must be at the heart of our vision if we are to share our saving message. Our congregation has this heart – a strong heart.

It is a congregation that takes risks, that forgives mistakes, that has hope and a sense of humor, a congregation that works hard and gives much. This congregation has a great heart, a loving heart, a brave heart, a powerful heart... and that heart is you.

This Unitarian Universalism, this congregation has a saving message. You are worthy. You are loveable. You belong here, in this world, in this life. We have a place for you here. You matter. And what you do matters. We can work together to make this world more just, more loving, more sane and more whole.

This is our saving message and our vision is to share this message; to welcome, to nurture, to serve and to empower. This congregation has always risen to its challenges and even thrived on challenge. This time is no different. No one else can do it. It's up to

us and I know – I know – that we are equal to the challenge, equal to this vision. Let us embrace our future with hope, with commitment, and with joy.

Amen.