

Where the Magic Happens

*Sermon by Rev. Sara LaWall, at the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
March 13, 2016*

Magic is happening! Are you feeling it? I know I do. I feel it every day.

The truth is magic has been happening in this fellowship for years, we're just celebrating it this month! But let's take a stroll down memory lane and remind ourselves of some magical highlights of the past.

This fellowship was organized in 1955 although Unitarianism existed with ministers in the early 1900's. In its early years, the fellowship was lay led, meeting in people's homes serving as a refuge for liberal free-thinkers, humanists, theists, seekers, and people looking for spiritual community. BUUF became known for its inclusiveness to multi-faith couples and families—a place where they could be married and worship together. It even became known for its early support of the gay and lesbian community. Think of the magic of that during the sixties and seventies, magic that continues still today.

In 1971 you moved into your first permanent home on Piece Park. Anytime a church successfully purchases and moves into a new building there is a **whole lotta magic** going on! I've heard lots of magical stories from the Pierce Park days, from special guest speakers, to choir performances, to sharing the chancel with a five foot pink flamingo (okay maybe that wasn't so magical).

In 1981 the fellowship called its first settled minister, Armida Alexander, and the commitment to full-time, settled ministry has run strong and deep with Rev. Elizabeth Greene's ministry lasting 25 years. I call that magic! Do you see the theme here?

In the late nineties and early 2000's you purchased this property and stewarded the building of this space and the two wings. Remember any church building project equals magic.

Over the 60+ years you have chosen to stand on the side of love for marriage equality, for refugees, for people experiencing homelessness and to stand shoulder to shoulder with our Muslim neighbors; work that still calls us to action today. You show up at the capitol for vigils and rallies. You sit, bearing witness for Add the Words, in the senate gallery as they drone on about a hypothetical constitutional convention while we have 78,000 Idahoans languishing in the healthcare gap (this last example was just this past Wednesday, I think I'm still recovering from it). This is indeed a place where the magic happens.

Making magic takes vision, energy, intention and the right ingredients. It requires that we step out of our comfort zone, sometimes far out of our comfort zone. It requires risk and trust and yes, perhaps even a little faith.

Magic and spell casting are pillars in the contemporary practice of Wicca and Paganism. But you don't just say some pretty words, burn a candle or make a little potion. The practice requires

you visualize and name your intention, you gather all the ingredients you need, you carefully craft your words, maybe you find a talisman and then you cast your spell, sending it out into the universe with your full being and blessing. But it doesn't end there, you bring your energy, intention, motivation and full self to this spell, you breathe it to life and you work toward its end.

It is clear to me this congregation has the vision, energy, intention, and the right ingredients to make the magic happen today, tomorrow, and for years to come. This weekend marks the kick-off of our Annual Giving Drive or AGD. This is the time of year when we ask you to make an annual pledge to the Fellowship for the next fiscal year.

Although this month might feel a little like NPR's pledge drive that interrupts programming with constant pleas for your pledges, that is not our goal. We hope this AGD campaign serves as the exclamation point on the magic we have been creating and witnessing all year long; a chance for you to be reminded of the power of this beloved community at work in our lives and in the world and to ask yourselves, how can we support the magic of this community as generously as possible?

Now, sermons like this one aren't easy. They are some of a minister's more difficult Sundays. My colleagues lovingly joke that pledge drive Sunday is also known as "The Sermon on the Amount." Now maybe our Minister Emerita, Rev. Elizabeth, got used to it after 25 years, *but here I am*, early on in our relationship wondering how this conversation around money and pledging will be shaped.

What is the minister's responsibility when it comes to discussing money and pledging? Do I address it directly? Or do I share my thoughts about money and our Unitarian Universalist values in some cryptic message so that when you leave you are not sure if I asked for more generosity, or if I just read another Mary Oliver poem.

I choose, I choose, not to be financially murky about money and here's why: I do not want financial murkiness to be this community's value. I don't want that.

In January, I preached on money and generosity, inviting us to imagine how we might talk about money and giving in connection with the church openly, freely, without the tension and fear and judgment we so often carry with us. I want to reiterate that intention again here today; that **the invitation to walk the generosity path is to increasingly approach money from a place of inner freedom and abundance.**

So what does approaching money from a place of inner freedom and abundance look like in your life? If generosity is a spiritual practice as we so often like to say, how often do you examine that spiritual practice and ask, how can I strengthen this practice, what more am I able to do? Is this spiritual practice of generosity grounded in gratitude or in expectation and obligation? How can I shift that thinking? These are questions I ask myself about my own spiritual practices, including giving.

So perhaps you are wondering, how much should I be giving?

I wish I had a magic spell. I wish that I could wave my magical minister's wand and cast a spell that would fulfill all our financial dreams with abundance and generosity; that everyone would give at their highest, most generous potential.

This is the time of year when I sometimes secretly wish I were a minister of a different faith tradition which had the magic of dogma and scripture. I often fantasize about how easy it would be to point to a passage and say look, right here it says to be considered one of the faithful, you must give 13.72% of your income to the church. That shows your devotion and faithfulness to God. It is your ticket straight to eternal life.

A former Mormon recently shared with me her story about how the church families would be called before the tithing settlement committee and be asked to swear that their tithe was the full 10% of their income, a commitment they make as faithful members of the church. Each family member is brought in one at a time, including the children to affirm this commitment to their church elders.

Now I know very well that I cannot stand up here and guilt any of you into giving. I can't use fear, dogma, or hellfire to move you to give. I can't use the old Baptist trick of telling you, "I'm gonna lock these doors until we get X dollars!" Even as tempting as that might be.

Because of course, that is not who we are and I am actually quite proud of that. We are a faith of the free. A faith of personal choice, of the freedom to search for our own truth and meaning. A faith where revelation is never sealed and where wisdom comes from many sources, including our own lived experience.

Rev. Victoria Weinstein writes that, "One of the privileges of our free church tradition is to provide all of the financial support for our many ministries from among ourselves. Generosity, therefore, is one of the spiritual values we recognize as central to our personal and our institutional well-being."

Every week before our offering, I remind us that when we give we say yes to the values we hold most sacred; money therefore is a tool of the sacred.

But I still haven't answered the question of how much. (*Maybe I should have titled this The Sermon on the Amount*). I want your pledges to be meaningful and significant for you. Meaningful in that your pledge embodies your commitment to this fellowship, your spiritual values, and your vision for the future. Significant in that it stretches you, that it becomes one of those monthly commitments you fulfill first rather than last.

Typically, in our tradition, we ask people to pledge 5% of their income as a meaningful and significant starting place. Now I know this may not be doable for everyone, and I know it can be hard for some. Michael and I are pledging 5% this year, and I will tell you something, this is the first time we have ever been able to do that for our church community. When we first started pledging to a church, we started small but we pushed our selves to make a significant and meaningful increase every year.

If you are not there yet, can you work toward a plan that will get you there? If you are there, what might it take to get you to 10%? In our beautiful brochure that was mailed out last month one graphic illustrated the number of our pledges at varying levels along a staircase (in another tradition we might call this the Stairway to Heaven). We hoped this would be a tool for you, not to get to heaven, but to help you see where you are on the stair steps and look at where you might go, how you might move up. And to those of you who are near the top of the steps and far beyond we are so very grateful for the foundation of support you provide to this congregation.

To all of you who give to this fellowship, we are so very grateful. You are the building blocks of beauty and passion, love and loyalty to this congregation and your generosity weaves the tapestry of beloved community. I asked you this question back in January and now I want to ask it again, how will we increase not our Standard of Living but rather our **Standard of Being** in the world? How will our generosity rise to meet our vision and mission, our hopes and dreams for this fellowship now and into the future?

Generosity not only creates tangible results but also intangible connections—that is part of the magic.

We have many tangible results we can point to this year alone – we’re offering a new worship service and small group discussion (Soulful Sundown and SoulTalk). We are weaving Social Justice more fully into the life of the congregation and expanding our reach in the community. Sixteen Junior High Youth are participating in Our Whole Lives, our acclaimed, comprehensive sexuality education program. I hope we are deepening our spiritual lives in worship and small groups—helping forge connections among newcomers and all our members. And, we’re growing, 42 new members since September!

I also want to share with you some of the intangible results of your generosity. Here is some of the magic you found in this congregation that you shared on our magic trees:

1. **Unconditional Love**
2. Love and support to our family after what happened to our family this summer
3. A caring community with respect for diversity
4. The magic of community and new friendships
5. The magic of coming home to the fellowship of the BUUF community, my new family
6. **Being welcomed for being me**
7. Wonderful friends and relationships
8. After attending BUUF for only a few months, I feel that I am renewed.
9. **BUUF brought back my spirit**
10. Amazing new friendships and knowledge!
11. BUUF has brought me a sense of community I feel so grateful to part of this loving caring group of people
12. **BUUF helps me be a kinder person, I need a weekly reminder**
13. Thank you for providing the magic of a safe space which to begin recovering from two years of upheaval in my life I am grateful

14. Acceptance. Peace of finding a place for my party
15. Hugs, sun lit chalice, music (magic!) laughs
16. Ministers!
17. Little Freya Bridges proclaiming to the entire gala – “This is My Home”
- 18. Inspiration to build a better world**
19. Leading the spiral dance at Winter Solstice
- 20. Our Partner Church relationship**
21. Our magic bridge to the world
22. Compassionate communication
23. The opportunity to participate in Quest
- 24. The magic of the music!**
 - a. **Touching. Healing. Connecting. Inspiring. Soothing. Energizing**
- 25. The dedication of the leaders of this community**
- 26. The magic of finding a whole new, very special family, and seeing our children grow into wonderfully thoughtful, compassionate and loving adults**
- 27. I never felt the magic until coming here. Now I feel the magic of “coming home”**

That is some powerful magic my friends! Magic worth supporting, nurturing, and growing today, tomorrow and well into the future.

Rev. John Wolf, the Minister Emeritus of a church in Tulsa, once wrote,

“You want to support a Unitarian Universalist church because it has a free pulpit. Because you can hear ideas expressed there that would cost any other minister his or her job. You want to support it because it is a place where walls between people are torn down rather than built up. You want to support a UU church because it is more concerned with human beings than with dogmas. Because it searches for the holy, rather than dwelling upon the depraved.

*You want to support a UU church because it can laugh. Because it stood for something in a day when religion is still more concerned with platitudes than with prejudice and war. You want to support it **not** because it buys you some insurance policy towards your funeral service but because it insults neither your intelligence nor your conscience, and because it calls you to worship what is truly worthy of your sacrifice. There is only one reason for joining a Unitarian Universalist church—because you want to support it!”*

Can I get an amen?!

Join us. We have Magic to Do!

SILENCE

HYMN - #358 Rank by Rank

What they dreamed by ours to do, hope their hopes and seal them true!”

BENEDICTION

Words by Miriam Woito

Magic happens in the in-betweens,
between your hand and mine,
between the meeting of our minds,
between our bodies and the earth,
between spirit and divine.
Magic unites all in wonder and awe
Magic is the creator of miracles

As we extinguish the flame of our chalice we carry with us the light of truth, love, and justice,
the light of magic at work in all our lives.

Go in peace