

We Worship with our Lives
Sunday, February 11, 2018

Good morning. I'm Ann Svensen, Parish Committee Co-Chair... and I rejoice in giving to this church because this church is doing things I rejoice in!

When I found Unitarian Universalism and this church 6 years ago, I found a place that finally made sense to me. I'm a transplant to Scituate. I grew up in central Mass going to Catholic or Episcopal churches sometimes on holidays or for funerals or weddings. When I was about 7 my mom and my friend Lisa's parents decided to send us down through the woods to the local Congregational church... alone. We went to Sunday school there, and I remember coveting the children's picture Bible. I thought it was beautiful and that it would help me understand and believe in all the Bible stories we were learning about. I remember opening it for the first time. What a monumental letdown. Even with the pictures, I couldn't fathom how Noah got all the animals on Earth onto his ark. I looked around the room and everybody else seemed to get it, so I just smiled along. I left there thinking, and I thought for a very long time, that something must be wrong with me because I couldn't understand or believe in something that everyone else did... So, aside from holidays, funerals, and weddings, for the next 33 years I didn't have anything to do with any church community... until I arrived here.

I found Unitarian Universalism on a recommendation from a friend. I had felt very alone in my view of the world for a very long time, and I was groaning that there really should be a place for people who don't believe in any one story line. The friend suggested Unitarian Universalism. I had never heard of it.

So I came here. And a whole new way of seeing the world opened up for me. I vividly remember Steve Cook, who was our interim minister then, giving a sermon one of my first days here, and he was talking about... Noah's Ark! He said something like, "This of course is a metaphor..." And I went... Whoa... What?!... It's a metaphor? Of course, it's a metaphor! All the stories are metaphors! My mind blew open. I can't believe I never realized this before. I was an English major in college for god sake. Now I felt like I could take something away from the stories because I wasn't trying to make myself believe in them.

Anyway, my mind continued to open, and then I discovered something even more amazing here. A community. A spiritual community. This community. How could I have had no idea that church was really about community? I decided that my kids NEEDED to come here... WITH me! They needed to know that there are so many different ways to look at life and to find meaning. They needed a place where they

could ask big questions and fit in no matter what they believed. And a community that would always welcome them back home no matter how far they traveled.

So we all started coming. And seeing them running around this old building like a second home made me happy. Seeing them interact with folks of all ages made me happy. Watching my daughter visit other houses of worship and meet new friends from churches all over the state makes me happy. Seeing my son play the manger in the holiday pageant makes me happy. We had found a community. A second family, one without all the baggage. (Without all that family baggage, anyway!) And this family reaches out a little farther into the world somehow.

My first year here, not really understanding how pledging worked or that our church is completely self-funded, I think I gave \$100.00. Then \$200.00 the next, thinking, "Good for me, I doubled my pledge!" But then the next year when I joined the Parish Committee, I really began to understand the operations of the church and realized that for us to support our vision and mission with our budget every adult in the church needed to give an average of \$1,000.00 a year. Ugh, I thought, that's a huge hit... But then I did the math over the whole year. Okay... If I just hit the average, that's about \$20.00 a week. And I thought, "Is this church worth \$20.00 a week to me, to my family?" Once, I looked at it this way, I upped my pledge to \$1,000.00 and have been trying to increase it a little bit each year. Some years it's easier to do that than others. This community gets that. And I know that this church would be here for me if I couldn't pledge a dime. So I give what I can, when I can.

And I can truly say I rejoice in giving to this church. This is an investment I want to make. I want to be sure this place is here for my kids to come home to when they're older... And I want to make sure that the children here now are making connections across generations and learning to see life through a much bigger lens than I did when I was a kid. And that when they're older, they have a place to come home to, too. I guess I just want all this to continue into the future...

So, That's MY story about what I rejoice in here. What do you rejoice in? Please turn to a neighbor – not someone you came with – and share in turn what do you rejoice in? What's the church doing that interests you... what gives you joy or courage or hope? And if this is your first time here, share something that would make you rejoice if you found it here.

Would anybody like to share something that they rejoice in First Parish? That's great!

And now I'll hand over the pulpit to Alma Morrisson, a member of the Finance Committee and so many other committees who also has a giving story to share. (She has so many wonderful stories to share!)

Alma Morrisson: I rejoice in giving to the church because the church is doing things I rejoice in.

I joined the Scituate Unitarian Church in 1968, 50 years ago. My husband and I had been married in a Unitarian Church, and when we moved to Scituate we had met the minister of this church in a civil rights group here in town. We joined his church because we wanted our young children to have a religious education in a community of people with whom we shared many beliefs – people who could help reinforce our values when we needed back-up. I started teaching church school almost immediately.

I had grown up with relatives who all went to different churches, and each seemed to believe that theirs had the only truth. I was sent to a Congregational Sunday School by myself, but it wasn't too bad because several school friends went there too. But I did not feel warmly toward it, or the religion it represented.

My real religious feelings came from my father, who never went to church but who read the New Testament, especially the words of Christ. He told me that when he was a young man he tried out all the churches but was most interested in being of service. He became a doctor and went to Africa as a medical missionary. When I knew him he had retired, loved Africa, but was disillusioned about churches.

I would describe this church in 1968 as a traditional New England Unitarian Church, very proud of having settled Scituate in 1628; proud of its early 19th century break with Trinitarianism; proud of its support for the abolition of slavery before the Civil War, and proud of the number of church members who continued the practice of leadership in town government – as members of the Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Planning Board, and other town bodies. But I had the impression that leadership within the church seemed to think that the church had reached perfection by then, and saw little need for further change.

The Unitarian Universalist Association had only come into existence seven years earlier in 1961 when the Unitarian denomination and the Universalist denomination voted to merge. . . .And it took a while before this church adopted the new name and became a bit more accepting of outside influences. But I judged it was a safe place for a rebel to hide, with its white steeple and historic exterior.

But the town was changing and so was church. The population of Scituate had just about tripled in the two decades after World War II, from 1945 to 1965; both the town and the church experienced the same influx of people from other places. Gradually as the makeup of the church changed, people brought in broader ideas of spiritual inclusion, as we see today.

Over these decades of change, I have held many of the positions in the church, as church school teacher, briefly as Director of Religious Education, as chair of the RE Committee, the Social Justice Committee, the Finance Committee, the Endowment Committee, and even the Parish Committee. I have seen firsthand what a difference it makes for the church to have money to carry out its programs. And to be able to afford a wonderful minister, an excellent music director, and a superb church administrator. And we hope next year, a new Director of Religious Education. We can't afford to take these staff for granted!

I long ago, I thought of my yearly gift of money as helping to keep the lights on, the building heated and hopefully to entice a minister to stay in this little town – and maybe even an organist. But we weren't asked to give much money.

Over the years, I've seen all the things that are needed to keep a congregation healthy. I pledge to give money because I love the people here; I love that they are open-minded; I love that they bring so many different experiences and are willing to talk about them. I believe in the vision of the church which we all articulated in a shared process last year. I love coffee hour where we can visit with old and new friends, hile kids run around in great exuberance. This is the only place where I can take part in activities with young parents, their children, teen-agers, people my own age, and all ages in between. I love the coffee house the church has started and the service to others that it helps support; I love these worship services which are so varied, and that connect with different people in different ways. And I love that we are comfortable with not having all the answers. This place has grown into the church I always wished it were.

Now that I'm retired, I have a much smaller income than when my husband and I were both working. I get Social Security, plus a very small annuity from his work, and I withdraw the required minimum distribution from my IRA, or retirement investments – in a small enough amount calculated to make the funds last until I'm 95. And I pledge \$1350 a year to the church. That's \$26/ week, about 3.5% of my income. It's a real stretch, but the benefits are priceless.

I rejoice in my giving to the church in many different ways. Would you please turn to a different neighbor this time, not some one you came with, and take a brief minute to share how you rejoice in giving?

Would any one like to tell all of us what you talked about?

Thank you for taking part in this service, which opens our Stewardship Season. You may have many questions – what is Stewardship ? What is a pledge? How should I figure out how much to give? Today we hope we have encouraged you to start thinking about why you rejoice in this church.