YOU CANNOT DEPEND ON YOUR EYES WHEN YOUR IMAGINATION IS OUT OF FOCUS

-Mark Twain
ON BECOMING A PEOPLE OF IMAGINATION

Buried in its roots, the word imagination carries the Proto-Indo-European root aim meaning “to copy” through the Latin root imitari meaning “to picture oneself.” There is a sense of imagination not being real, but a copy. An improved copy, a possible copy, a representation of what could be.

READ

*Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler

“Coronavirus will change the world permanently. Here’s How.”
https://tinyurl.com/skfkpoq

“Rainy Wedding” https://www.npr.org/2012/05/20/153116028/rainy-wedding

WATCH

TED Talk with Dan Gilbert on “The psychology of your future self”
https://tinyurl.com/yb7p9ke2

“Unfinished Portraits: On using imagination to honor the loss of Black lives”
https://tinyurl.com/y9uqgdqw

“Imagining the Future of UUism” https://youtu.be/H7sjTUk-iu0

“Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living, it’s a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope.”

—Theodore Geisel/Dr. Seuss
FROM THE MINISTERS
by Rev. Roger Bertschausen & Rev. Kelly Crocker

Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

—Arundhati Roy, *The pandemic is a portal*

Our worship theme this year has focused on the question, “Who are we becoming?” What a fitting theme for this global pandemic year and continued ministerial transition here at FUS. Both in the world and in our community, we are in a threshold moment, a time between what was and what’s next. We are betwixt and between. What lies beyond this threshold is not yet clear—for the world, for our nation, and for FUS—though it is beginning to come into more clarity.

These betwixt and between moments are neither comfortable nor easy. The picture of betwixt and between moments in the Hebrew Bible is a wild and seemingly endless wilderness. It is a scary space, which could be filled with anxiety and dread. And yet, it is necessary space if we are to keep growing as individuals and as a people. It is the space where, as Richard Rohr writes, “genuine newness can begin.” Rohr encourages us to enter threshold spaces “often and stay as long as you can.” Otherwise, we start idolizing normalcy. The problem with trying to preserve normalcy is that it becomes stagnant territory for our souls, and as the pandemic has painfully made us aware, normalcy is ephemeral. The status quo doesn’t last forever, no matter how much we try to hang onto it. The world is in a constant process of evolution and change, as are we.

Over the past months, we have been exploring spiritual tools that can help us, such as emotional intelligence and learning how to be in the stillness. This month, we explore imagination. This may be the most important spiritual tool we have for this threshold moment. As the next stages of the pandemic (the vaccine) and FUS’s ministerial transition (a candidate presented to the congregation in April) beckon, this is a particularly good time to open and unleash our imaginations. As

Glennon Doyle writes, “Perhaps imagination is not where we go to escape reality but where we go to remember it.” Imagining the post-pandemic world and FUS anew will help us stay open to and curious about possibilities. It will help us not succumb to the futility of trying to recreate the world that lies behind us. It will help us move into a new world and a new FUS that is congruent with our deepest values and aspirations. We can’t reshape the new world if we have no idea what we’d like it to look like. Or, as Yogi Berra said, “If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up someplace else.”

In the month ahead, may we imagine—boldly, expansively, creatively, joyfully!

With gratitude for this journey we share, Roger and Kelly
For the past several years, the board has been steadily working on renewing and improving our understanding of the governance processes. Governance can be difficult to discuss in the abstract, and the intentional interim period of ministerial transition has been an ideal time to not just examine the concepts, but to try out new practices. In the past several months, there have been many milestones in establishing a more routine cadence of key governance activities.

The board has identified three strategic priorities for the 2020-21 program year, continuing as long as needed into the following year when the new ministry team is in place. The priorities are intended to provide, in a concise and easy to communicate format, direction on limited areas of focus for the year. Other congregational activities will, of course, also continue. The priorities place a particular emphasis on areas where we will strive to live out our vision as a community throughout the year. The strategic priorities help provide direction in decision making and in the use of resources and staff time. If you happen to receive a “no” or “not at this time” to an idea or request, which will inevitably occur in the course of prioritization, please know that the commitment to a limited scope of activities is offered in a spirit of stewardship of our shared resources, faithfulness to our common values, and in honoring our many covenantal relationships within our FUS community and beyond our walls.

The Leadership Team (consisting of the ministers and Executive Director—Kelly, Roger, and Monica) is now structuring its monthly reports to the board specifically in reference to these priorities. The reports, which include opportunities for input from the full staff, are helpful points of connection between congregation, board, ministers, and staff across all operations and programming, without creating an administrative burden.

Building on the multiple reviews of our governance model with the Governance Committee, the Leadership Team, the FUS members who were instrumental in its implementation, and Dan Hotchkiss (church governance consultant), the board is also spending a larger portion of our meeting time devoted to open question work. (Hotchkiss’s advice is to spend up to half of the board time on this.)

The board’s ongoing goal is to have improved continuity in planning from year to year, with repeatable and sustainable governance activities. We are grateful to all those who have participated in discussions and contributed to these efforts. A summary of themes arising in the open question conversation at the December parish meeting is included in this newsletter. Look for future opportunities for board-hosted conversations throughout the year.
Vision of Ministry & Strategic Priorities

We seek to...

- GROW in mind and spirit,
- CONNECT with one another, and
- EMBODY UU VALUES within ourselves, FUS, and beyond our walls.

To make progress toward fulfilling our vision in 2020-2021, we prioritize

- Nurturing a strong sense of community through the pandemic—taking care of ourselves and one another with love.
- Dismantling systems of oppression, particularly racism.
- Practicing adaptability, supporting our Search Team, and engaging in the process as FUS searches for a new minister to join Rev. Kelly Crocker next fall.
Thank you to all who joined the parish meeting on December 6, which focused in part on our open question process. One parish meeting a year is dedicated to this opportunity to engage with fellow congregants around an important issue. Feedback from these discussions is shared with the Board of Trustees to help guide and inform our shared work.

Our open question this year was, “What would it look like for FUS to center people of color?” Acknowledging that “centering” may be a new concept or terminology for folks, we leaned on the guidance provided in “Five Ways to Center People of Color” by Erin Okuno on the blog Fakequity to provide context. The prominent themes that emerged in our conversations were:

- Congregational diversity
- Philanthropy
- Partnering
- Conflict
- Listening
- Inward reflection
- Connection to the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA)

**Congregational Diversity**

Many groups approached racial diversity in our congregation throughout their discussions, and this was certainly not a new topic of conversation for many. Some expressed frustration with FUS trying to be more diverse in the past without success. Others were uncomfortable with the concept of “recruiting” Black, Indigenous, and people of color and did not think that’s what the concept of centering was really about.

Familiar conversations occurred about some of the reasons why people of color do not attend FUS, including: a lack of Christian theology, our style of service may not be appealing, and people may want to congregate with those more similar to them. However, these assumptions were also challenged. Many folks noted that there are more people of color in online UU fellowships, indicating that our UU values may be less of an obstacle in attending FUS and more about our unwillingness to make an internal change. One group noted that many people of color have visited FUS but stopped coming because they experienced microaggressions in our community.

**Philanthropy**

Next, many groups discussed philanthropy—both financial and volunteer support—toward organizations that serve people of color. Philanthropy was expressed as both a good step to take and not enough to center people of color. Centering would mean shifting the power dynamics. As a congregation, we often want to choose exactly what organizations spend money on, and have the ability to pull our support at any moment. Essentially, the power is still held by our majority white congregation.

**Partnering**

Partnering with organizations or communities led by people of color was also frequently mentioned. Examples included pulpit and choir exchanges with congregations with more diverse representation, building relationships with organizations serving communities of color, and providing building space for speakers or events that center the voices of people of color. In many conversations, partnering was brought up as a way to increase congregational diversity.

**Conflict**

A theme that came up more than once was conflict, specifically that there was contentiousness and tension in the discussions themselves. While frustrating and uncomfortable, some groups understood the need to have difficult and uncomfortable conversations. Some also shared a recognition that we need to come to grips with being in conflict if we are going to progress in our
anti-racism efforts. Conflict avoidance is, after all, one marker of the white supremacy culture that we are working to dismantle. We should also bear in mind that resistance and hostility to prioritizing racial justice issues in any organization is often experienced as hurtful to people of color and their allies, and this can quickly diminish our efforts to be a welcoming community.

Listening
People identified the need to listen to more people of color. Bringing in more speakers or ministers of color to our worship services was one way to reach the full congregation. There was also a desire to hire organizations or consultants of color to help us better understand how to become an anti-racist congregation. It was also noted that we should not expect this service for free and that people of color need to be paid for their labor in educating majority-white organizations.

A couple of great books were mentioned more than once—*Mistakes and Miracles: Congregations on the Road to Multiculturalism* by Nancy Palmer Jones and Karin Lin, *I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* by Austin Channing Brown, and *Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry*, edited by Mitra Rahnema.

Inward Reflection
This leads us to the theme of inward reflection, prioritizing a learning mindset, and not assuming that as a congregation, we are free of complicity in our culture of white supremacy. Part of this work includes understanding the history of racism in our country and how FUS has perpetuated racism in our communities.

This theme added some steps to the above desires to partner or increase congregational diversity. People expressed that we should certainly partner with other organizations but note that this is not an area where we should try to lead the conversation. We need more listening and less talking in these engagements. We recognized that our worship service style should not cater only to a white, upper-middle-class aesthetic, but that welcoming people of color also meant ensuring that they encountered fewer racial microaggressions when engaging with FUS.

Connection to the UUA
Connection to the UUA was important to some participants. Some shared their experience of attending General Assembly (GA) where there are very many relevant conversations around race and racism within our congregations. (Note that GA will be held virtually in 2021. We hope that many FUS members will attend!) The UUA recently published *Widening the Circle of Concern*, a report that shares experiences of people of color in UU congregations and recommends concrete steps to address the problematic orientation to race in UU organizations. Those who have already engaged with this text recommended it as a great resource and noted that FUS does not need to be on its own in this journey.

There are also many great opportunities to get involved in this work at FUS already. Here are just a few of our current opportunities to dive further into this conversation:

- **Racial Justice Ministry Team book study.** You’re invited to join us for the team’s learning circle study of *Widening the Circle*, the Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change. This is critically important work for all Unitarian Universalists as we work to understand the power structures and analyze systemic racism in our culture and within our congregation. You can find the report here: [https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic/widening](https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic/widening). Contact Rev. Kelly at kellyc@fusmadison.org if you’d like to participate.

- **Dr. Christy Clark-Pujara presentation on January 10, 2021.** FUS is proud to co-sponsor this program organized by our neighbor, First Baptist Church of Madison. Dr. Clark-Pujara’s talk will be on the history of race-based slavery in America and the complicity of its core institutions—including the church. There will be time for questions following the talk. More information and registration is available at [http://firstbaptistmadison.org/complicity-in-the-making](http://firstbaptistmadison.org/complicity-in-the-making).
I’m sure that like me, many of you are missing the sounds, energy, and curiosity of our FUS kids. So it might bring you comfort, as it has for me, to know that while we have far fewer kids involved in CRE this year, the kids who are participating are having wonderful virtual experiences! I’ve had the privilege of attending almost all of our virtual CRE classes this year (we have eleven of them, including the two Mind, Body and Soul classes and the two Coming of Age classes, all of which switched from meeting in-person to meeting virtually). I wish I could adequately convey how wonderful those experiences have been! Our 39 volunteer teachers (not including Karen Anderson and me; we are each teaching two classes) have been so incredibly committed and creative in finding great ways to engage our kids during their Zoom classes.

One of the great gifts of virtual classes is how they invite us into participants’ homes and families in ways that physical classes do not allow. We’ve met MANY of our kids’ pets, which has been delightful! Our K-1 kids were able to meet one participant’s newborn brother just days after his birth. Another Zoomer was able to introduce her grandmother to the group when she attended her virtual class while visiting at her grandma’s house. One of our students joined class while traveling in a car and shared images of the countryside as they were driving through it. Many of our teachers have engaged the kids in scavenger hunts, a virtual variation on “show and tell.” With prompts like “Go find something that you created and are proud of,” or “Go find something that makes you feel loved,” our kids are sharing pieces of their lives that we’d otherwise never know about.

In learning about the importance of the arts, our K-1 kids each created scratch art (the materials were mailed to them ahead of time) while listening to classical music and then shared their artwork. Another class created a virtual “gratitude tree” by writing things they are grateful for onto leaves and then moving the leaves onto their gratitude tree. There have been amazing breathing exercises, role plays, and storytelling from many voices, thanks to YouTube. Our Building Bridges class has explored other religions through shared videos of worship sites and guest speakers. Our second and third graders had a blast sharing jokes while making cards to send to some of our FUS members who have been more isolated during this pandemic.

What strikes me most about all of this is the strength of our community. The commitment it takes from our teachers to find creative ways to adapt our curriculum and to learn new technological skills is just amazing to me. They are working so much harder this year to make this all work, and they deserve ALL of our gratitude! The kids are showing their commitment as well. They are engaged, sharing stories and compassion with each other, and bringing with them a spirit of joy and belonging.

I wish our broader FUS community could see the magic that is happening. Know that it is there, and it is beautiful! When we all converge again within the walls of FUS, we will bring with us wonderful new connections and experiences that no pandemic could take away from us!
A Winter Holiday Story

Written by Corben, Maisie, Leo, Elena, Lucie, Clare, Eadie, Thomas, Thea, Adalee, and Karen

During the darkest part of winter, in a land far, far away called New Jersey, a teeny tiny pink-footed Panda was talking with her friends. She said, “The nights are so dark and long now, let’s have a celebration with colorful lights and Silly Triangle Brownies to bring us joy.”

Her friend, Deer jumped up and down and said, “Yes, let’s paint the snow red and make decorations to put on our special Log. The Bunny clapped his bones with excitement adding, “When the first star comes out, we can make 5 wishes! Then, we can dance together and sing ‘The Itsy-Bitsy Spider.’”

The animals in the forest worked together. They spent 6 days making food and decorating the woods for their holiday party.

When they were finished, the forest looked beautiful! The animals invited their neighbors to come to the Winter Celebration. Everyone came, some even brought more treats to share. Together, they ate delicious food, built a giant igloo, plus a snowman, and made many snow angels.

When it grew dark, the lights they used to decorate the forest twinkled, casting a cheerful glow on the party. The animals each made 5 wishes on the first star they saw. They kept their wishes secret so they would come true. The forest animals shared stories. Together, they laughed, they danced, and they sang the “Itsy-Bitsy Spider.” Everyone was so happy with their Winter Celebration that they decided next year when the nights grew long, they would throw a new winter party!

Thanks to our preschool class for sharing the story they created together in December.
WARTMANN WORKSHOP

by Brittany Crawford, Communications Director

Last November, a group of members and staff participated in the Trans-inclusion in Congregations course created by the Transforming Hearts Collective, offered through our Joyce and William Wartmann Lecture Series. I had, what I would call, a holy privilege of leading this course with the Rev. Kelly Crocker and Janet Swanson.

What I appreciated about this course was its intentionality in moving beyond a “trans 101” approach. This course pushed me to think differently and holistically about what it means to be a welcoming community. The focus was not on just creating gender-inclusive bathrooms or adding pronoun stickers—although these are important aspects of the work—instead, the course pushed us to think about culture and how it relates to building a community of radical welcome. As one of the presenters said, “you’re not getting a checklist, you’re getting a framework.”

And that’s where it gets messy. Changing culture is difficult. It doesn’t matter if it’s mainstream culture, our family culture, or our community culture here at FUS. The cultural iceberg illustration captures this well—most of what we see is only a fraction of the whole. The values and beliefs that reside below the surface are sometimes difficult to not only identify but difficult to change as well.

The status quo, or the dominant culture, is what keeps the dominant group comfortable, and we all experience varying degrees of privilege. Often when we talk about intersectionality, we speak about the individual—the way one person embodies a multitude of identities and varying degrees of privilege. What we discussed in the trans-inclusion course is the intersectionality in our justice work (this work is both actions and internal reflection) and how changing the culture to celebrate trans lives also means addressing white supremacy culture.

We often think of our justice work in terms of issues and objectives when the heart of this work centers on relationships. These relationships include other people whose experiences in the world are different from our own and the relationship we have with our own unconscious biases. Changing culture hinges on our abilities to be in relationship with each other.

Relationship asks us to be present to the humanity of another and to allow the life of this person to transform how we view the world. When we cultivate relationships, we unlock the power of empathy and change to create a community of radical welcome.

The second installment of our Wartmann Lecture Series is a workshop presented by the one of the creators of the trans-inclusion course. Zr. Alex Kapitan will lead us in a workshop on changing culture on February 7, from 1 to 3 pm. The best part is that you will not need to have completed the course to participate in the workshop. This workshop is one of many ways we’re building relationships and expanding our justice work right here in our community. Please plan on joining us.

Visit www.fusmadison.org/wartmann to register for the workshop on Sunday, February 7, from 1 pm to 3 pm.
**COMMUNITY INFORMATION**

**Wheel of Life**
Congratulations to Barb Avery and Geoff Merrill as they welcome their newest grandson, Henry Boyd Seal, born November 24 in Annapolis, Maryland.

Tedros “Teddy” Milligan Smithka was born on November 2 to Chris Smithka and Haben Goitom. Teddy joins proud big sisters, Sophia and Feven.

Our love and condolences to Shaun O’Keefe on the death of her husband, Scott Schabow, who passed on November 30. Scott lived life as a grand adventure full of passion and enthusiasm and is deeply missed by his family and friends. We send our prayers to Shaun and Scott’s family as they grieve the loss of this amazing love-filled man.

Happy (belated) 97th birthday to Sparrow Senty, and happy (belated) 74th wedding anniversary wishes to blushing bride Sparrow and her dashing young groom Al Senty.

We mourn the death of Thom Boykoff who passed away on Monday, December 28. Thom was a long time lay minister, for more than 20 years, and those who attended our 9 am services may remember him welcoming all at the bottom of the stairs each Sunday. He is deeply missed.

**Ministerial Search Update from December 2, 2020**
On December 2, we emailed a comprehensive ministerial search update to the congregation. You can read this email, and all supplemental documents, at www.fusmadison.org/searchupdate.

**Candidating Week Announcement**
Please mark your calendars for our virtual “Candidating Week” from April 25 to May 2, 2021. On Sunday, April 25, and Sunday, May 2, the candidate will lead our worship services, and a congregational vote to decide on calling our next minister will take place on Sunday, May 2, at 11:30 am.

**New Webinar Series Available**
The International Unitarian/Universalist Joint Working Group released a five-part webinar series in fall 2020 exploring the question, “Are we an imperial faith?” All five sessions are available online at https://www.uua.org/international/engagement/webinar. Rev. Roger was one of the four presenters for this series.

**Sustainability Team Meeting**
Everyone is welcome to join in the meeting of the Sustainability Team. We meet on the first Tuesday of the month at 7 pm. In January, we will meet on January 5. Zoom information is provided on the homepage of our website.
Sunday, January 3
“Compassionate Imaginings” with Rev. Kelly J. Crocker, Minister of Congregational Life
Humans have a unique capacity to envision that which is not, to use imagination to move from the realm of the known to the realm of the possible. Imagination can truly be transformative and revolutionary, especially when we recognize its power to help us empathize with others who have lived vastly different lives than our own. What possibilities can be found when we mingle our power of imagination with our deep capacity for compassion? How can we, and our world, be changed? The FUS music staff will present music for the new year, including Benjamin Britten’s *New Year Carol*.

Sunday, January 10
“Theological Imagination” with Rev. Roger Bertschausen, Interim Minister
In the landmark report *Widening the Circle of Concern*, the UUA’s Commission on Institutional Change argues that in the last century, we UUs have centered spiritual exploration largely and sometimes even solely in the individual rather than the congregation. When it comes to making sense of the world and forming our beliefs, we’re better doing this together than alone. What would it look like to do the work of theology more together, even as we understand we will still come to individual conclusions? What role could imagination play in this? Linda Warren will play music for solo harp.

Sunday, January 17 @ 11 am*
“Celebrating the Life & Dream of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”
The Kujichagulia Madison Center for Self-Determination, which annually organizes events celebrating MLK Day and Juneteenth, is presenting its interfaith MLK worship celebration on Sunday morning this year. FUS is joining other area congregations in making the celebration our service for the weekend, and FUS is honored to be the host site for filming most of the service.

*The interfaith service will premiere on YouTube at 11 am on January 17 rather than our usual 10 am service start.

Sunday, January 24
“Prophetic Imagination”
with Rev. John Crestwell Co-Executive Minister, UU Church of Annapolis
We’re thrilled to welcome Rev. Crestwell to lead this service. Rev. John served many years as Associate Minister of the Annapolis church. In August, he joined newly called minister Rev. Anastassia Zinke as Co-Executive Ministers of the church. (Since FUS is going to undergo a similar transition this year, FUS is drawing on Rev. John’s and his church’s experience.) Rev. John is one of the most gifted preachers in the UUA. Among other things, he serves as an Adjunct Professor at the UU seminary in Chicago and teaches Comparative Religion, African American History, and Public Speaking at a Washington, DC, college. All of the FUS music staff will participate in the morning’s music.

Sunday, January 31
“The State of FUS” with Rev. Roger Bertschausen, Interim Minister
I was planning to do this type of sermon near the end of my year of interim ministry at FUS but decided sharing my observations well before I headed to the exit door would be more useful. I look forward to sharing my observations after watching FUS mostly from afar and then parachuting in mid-pandemic. I will talk about FUS’s many and powerful strengths, its challenges, and do some imagining about the future that will unfold starting on August 1 when a new co-minister arrives. FUS Children’s and Youth Choir Director Heather Thorpe will sing.
Things to Think
by Robert Bly

Think in ways you’ve never thought before.
If the phone rings, think of it as carrying a message
Larger than anything you’ve ever heard,
Vaster than a hundred lines of Yeats.

Think that someone may bring a bear to your door,
Maybe wounded and deranged; or think that a moose
Has risen out of the lake, and he’s carrying on his antlers
A child of your own whom you’ve never seen.

When someone knocks on the door, think that he’s about
To give you something large: tell you you’re forgiven,
Or that it’s not necessary to work all the time, or that it’s
Been decided that if you lie down no one will die.

Read more of Robert’s poetry at https://clodandpebble.wordpress.com.