"In the end, they will know our commitments by our actions."

-Rev. Scott Tayler
I considered ways of talking around instead of about the theme of commitment. I landed on taking my own advice of “the only way is through.”

I started by looking up synonyms for commitment hoping that a slight variation, a renaming, might make the process easier. Talking about “promise” or “responsibility” isn’t going to change the reality that I still have to sit with the memories of broken promises and failed good intentions. Perhaps you are human too and share in an understanding of why people shy from making commitments.

The most vivid memory of a broken promise that comes to mind is my confirmation day. I can still see the yellow and blue stained glass illuminated by the warm November sun as I stood before my family and the congregation. I promised that day to “uphold the church with my prayers, my presence, my gifts, and my service,” confirming my commitment to the United Methodist Church. Making a commitment of this magnitude was probably not age appropriate for any eleven-year-old, but it was one I made with earnest, good intentions.

As I recall how both the United Methodist Church and I broke our commitments to each other through painful, human limitations imposed on divine love, I recalled David Whyte’s poem, Finisterre:

The road in the end taking the path the sun had taken, into the western sea, and the moon rising behind you as you stood where ground turned to ocean: no way to your future now but the way your shadow could take, walking before you across water, going where shadows go, no way to make sense of a world that wouldn’t let you pass except to call an end to the way you had come, to take out each frayed letter you had brought and light their illumined corners; and to read them as they drifted on the western light; to empty your bags; to sort this and to leave that; to promise what you needed to promise all along, and to abandon the shoes that had brought you here right at the water’s edge, not because you had given up but because now, you would find a different way to tread...part of you would still walk on.

Whyte’s poem left me wondering if perhaps there are promises we break, commitments we shatter, in our human messiness, and maybe there are promises we intentionally end and are transformed through that ending. “...to promise what you needed to promise all along, and to abandon the shoes that had brought you here right at the water’s edge, not because you had given up but because now, you would find a different way to tread...part of you would still walk on.”

We enter into commitments with good intent, holding an expansive hope, and trusting that while we don’t know where it all ends, that all is not destroyed at the water’s edge. Life happens between the making and the ending of all commitments. Perhaps there is a space where commitments are not simply kept or broken but are transformed and renewed. Perhaps good intentions are not what paves the road to hell, as my grandmother would say, maybe they line the road of a life honestly lived.
The underappreciated Unitarian Universalist theologian Henry Nelson Wieman writes: “Inevitably in our lives, we commit ourselves to something, whether worthy or not. The direction and intensity of our loyalties give shape and meaning to our lives. Loyalties, commitments, covenants, the promises we make to one another: These are the things [that] tell us to what we belong. By doing so, they tell us who we are.”

At the end of the Coming of Age class, we invite our youth to share their credos—a statement of what they believe on the cusp of adulthood. The root of credo is literally “I set my heart on,” or “I give my heart to.” It reminds us of the great importance of answering the question, “where does one put one’s heart?” So each year, we ask our youth: To what do you give your heart?

This notion of aligning our hearts toward something that brings our lives meaning stretches across cultures. In Hindu, the term is Sraddha, which translates as “to set one’s heart on.” The religious life, they say, begins with finding in one’s life something to which one gives one’s heart. For most if not all of us, how we answer that question when we are 15 differs—sometimes greatly—from how we answer that question at 35 or 55 or 85. If we are to live a spiritually centered life, it is a question that we must continue to ponder.

How do you answer that question today?

Roger’s answer (at this moment): I give my heart to the interdependent web, the visible and mostly invisible ties that bind together all life. Sometimes I use “the divine” as a symbol for this. Sometimes after binging on Star Wars movies, I use the Force as a symbol for this. This thing I give my heart to lies at the center of my commitment to my family, individual congregations such as FUS, as well as our global Unitarian/Universalist faith, and the messy, nitty-gritty work of embodying justice and mutuality where I live.

Kelly’s answer (at this moment): I give my heart to the magic that I find every day in this world and this life we share. I believe this magic, this great Mystery, resides in all things, including each and every one of us. Our work is to help one another uncover this magic deep within us. It is what connects us to one another and reminds us that we are each welcome here, in this time and in this place. I believe this is what calls us into relationship and into community, into the creation of shared life, and opens our hearts to create spaces of deep belonging where all are valued, all are celebrated, all are welcomed home.

This month, as we contemplate what it means to be a people of commitment, we’re focusing on these questions: To what do you give your heart? How do you make this commitment come tangibly alive in your life? Is this thing to which you give your heart worthy of being at your center? To what do you belong?

In faith and love,

Kelly and Roger

Across the Unitarian/Universalist World
with Rev. Roger Bertschausen
Tuesday, March 16, from 6:30-8 pm

One of the great joys of serving as Executive Director of the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council was learning about the many, varied forms of our faith across the world. This class will give an overview of these forms with a special emphasis on fascinating U/U communities in Northeast India, the Philippines, and Indonesia. We UUs in the United States have a lot we can learn from our overseas spiritual kinfolk.
Lay Ministry for These Times

by Cricket Gage & Roz Woodward, FUS Lay Ministers

The First Unitarian Society’s Lay Ministry program was created to augment the called ministers’ pastoral and outreach services to FUS members. Through personal example and direct service, lay ministers extend care under the guidance of the called ministers and enhance members’ experience of our community.

The pandemic has not changed the mission, but it has changed the method, so we felt it was time to let you know what we do and how to reach us.

Lay ministers serve in many ways. Some of us coordinate, provide, and deliver meals to members and affiliates in times of need. This service has been particularly active this year as people are more isolated after surgeries, accidents, and all manner of life events. Some of us provide pastoral care in gardens, on front porches, and on walks when weather permits. Though we no longer make personal visits to hospitals and nursing facilities, we try to remain connected through phone call check-ins, emails, text messages, and greeting cards.

After virtual services, we take turns attending the virtual coffee hour. Here, we keep an ear and an eye out for cares and concerns that may benefit from further support.

The pandemic has required our ongoing groups to convert into a virtual format:

- The Caregiver’s Group which meets monthly, more often if necessary, supports those who are long-term caregivers.

- The Healing Journey’s Grief Group meets on the first Saturday of each month for those who are mourning losses. With difficulty holding memorial services these days, we offer grief packets. These are delivered directly to homes and are a way to support the creation of personal rituals to mark a loved one’s passing.

- The Pandemic Support Group gathers each Thursday morning and is open to all those who seek companionship as we negotiate these difficult times. The Zoom link can be found on the FUS website.

Our fertile imaginations have been activated to provide opportunities for engagement throughout this challenging time:

- In Reimagine Celebrations, we came together in November to grieve our distance from loved ones and one another, to contemplate gratitude in its rich simplicity, and to take that essence and use it to deepen our connection to those we love and appreciate. We met again in December to process the magic of winter.

- We held Blue Christmas online this year to continue the tradition of holding a comforting space and ritual for those who struggle through this time of year.

- With your help, we constructed a Solstice Evergreen Spiral on the FUS grounds to celebrate turning toward the light.

- Since Cabaret, several lay ministers have been cooking and hosting virtual dinner parties you generously bid into being. Thank you for all your participation this year. We want you to know we are here for you should you need us.

If you or a loved one would like to connect with a lay minister, you can do so through the following link: www.fusmadison.org/getting-involved/lay-ministry or call (608)233-9774, ext. 126.

To find out more about joining our ranks, please contact Rev. Kelly Crocker at kellyc@fusmadison.org.
In this final year of ministerial transition, we as a community will receive remarkable clarity of purpose and promise. Centering us this year has been our strategic priorities, offering a road map and gently blanketing every aspect of the work we do together as staff and community. Thus, the guided road we embraced this year as we prepared for our annual Stewardship Campaign was an approach that underscores a clarity of purpose beyond just financial targets. To be clear, providing attainable and realistic campaign goals is central to our fiscal responsibility as a community. We believe that each gift comes from a place of generosity and shared promise.

Planning for this Stewardship Campaign began in earnest last year as we focused on membership numbers and member engagement as important bell-weather for long-term and sustainable financial outcomes. The clarity of purpose which emerged from our membership roll project was a robust effort to support continued connection and engagement with one another. As a community of love, justice, and hope, we ask you to think about what FUS means to you.

Your shared stories and artifacts of this time together while apart, what FUS means to you, will be the heart of the messaging for this unique Stewardship Campaign. We believe this is the first of many future ways of encouraging our members to deepen their relationship with each other and the larger community, supporting member engagement now and for the future of FUS. The staff and program areas you engage with most often will be your guide for how to participate in sharing your story. We look forward to sharing every connection.

In addition to messages of member engagement, our ministerial team will be the weekly voice of our Stewardship Campaign through the month of March. We believe this is a unique time for both the world outside FUS and our future within FUS. The ministers’ messages encourage us to support what FUS brings to the lives of our members and all ways we give back to our larger community. We are also encouraging everyone to attend the Cottage Meetings we are scheduling in March. If you would like to be a host of a Cottage Meeting, please contact me at cheryllm@fusmadison.org. You will find more information on Stewardship Cottage Meetings in the Red Floors and on our website.

Setting attainable goals that will support FUS beyond this campaign is important to our long-term and sustainable financial future. Still true this year, our annual Stewardship Campaign is another way we fulfill our promises to each other and this place. Donations from this annual campaign support nearly 80% of our total operating budget. One goal this year is to increase our number of Sustaining Stewards from 40% of our giving households to 50%. We also recognize that this unusual year has created financial hardships for many. We encourage all generous donors to consider increasing their previous donation as a commitment to others in our community who cannot pledge more at this time.

It is with hope that we look forward to being together again and sharing our stories of how FUS brought us closer and more connected while apart.
As we reflect on what it means to become a people of commitment, I’d lift up the sister virtue of “resilience.” The ability to remain dedicated and persistent, despite setbacks or challenges, seems essential if we are to remain meaningfully engaged with our commitments. From the global to the personal, how often have we been reminded this year, in the face of adversity, of the need to be relentless, despite weariness, in our commitment to our values and visions for ourselves and our communities?

In regards to FUS and its commitments to harness collective resources to support our shared mission and priorities, we have not been free of challenges. As staff and lay leaders have watched the decade-long trend of declining pledge units, we’ve remained resilient and committed. We’ve been resourceful, leaning on less traditional sources of income to help balance the budget. We’ve also remained committed to our values of mindful stewardship and fiscal sustainability, cutting expenses as needed while prioritizing programs and initiatives lifted up by the Board of Trustees and the parish’s chosen vision of ministry. I’m grateful for the good, hard work and discernment that we’ve done together.

And as we embark upon the annual stewardship campaign this month, and we ask each other to decide again how our commitments to our shared values will manifest in our financial generosity, I wonder with genuine curiosity what the near future holds for FUS. Will the anticipated arrival of a new minister bring a surge of energy and resources? Will our new clarity and frequent communication about our strategic priorities bring deeper engagement? Will emerging from this global pandemic find us filling auditorium chairs to an extent we’ve not yet seen, so many of us craving a hand to hold and a community to embrace? I don’t know. But I know I’m deeply committed to doing everything I can to make these hopes a reality, and I hope you are, too. And in the meantime, let’s take a look at our year-to-date finances.

According to our “Statement of Financial Position” report, as of December 30, 2020, we had a total of $343,000 in cash and cash equivalents. This includes money in the Operating, Designated, and Capital Funds and is approximately $1.7 million less than last year at this time, given the payments for our Meeting House restoration and the $1 million pay down on our mortgage, which now stands at $2.9 million. Our fixed assets (for things such as our land, building, furniture, equipment, etc.) have an estimated value of $10.26 million, for a combined total of $10.6 million in assets.

**CAPITAL**

As of December 31, we had $277,000 in the Capital Fund, which is the remainder of the unrestricted funds we received from our roof damage insurance claim. In our Capital Fund this fiscal year, we saw just over $16,000 in income, $16,000 in budgeted expenses, and $23,000 in budgeted transfers to the operating fund to support our building loan payment, resulting in a net income of approximately -$23,000. We have officially completed and paid all aspects of the 2017 Building a Legacy—Capital Campaign. We are awaiting approximately $100k in Capital Campaign pledge payments and hope to receive the majority of those in the next six months.

**DESIGNATED & RESTRICTED**

In our Designated & Restricted Fund account, we began the year with nearly $49,000, accepted approximately $500 in new donations, completed $18,000 in parish-approved transfers to the Operating Fund, spent $2,700, and thus ended the quarter with $28,000 across these eight funds.
OPERATING

Last Spring, functioning on the best guesses we had about what this year would look like, we approved a year-to-date Operating Fund budget that anticipated $955,000 in income and $904,000 in expenses, projecting a $51,000 mid-year surplus. This fall, we worked with staff to complete a more accurate budget that estimated $886,000 in income and $873,000 in expenses. Ultimately our actual income fell short of both estimates with $747,000 received to date. We were able to spend less than either budget anticipated, ending the calendar year with $840,000 in expenses, therefore completing the first two quarters with just over a $93,000 deficit. The two income areas where we were hardest hit were “Pledge Payments” and “Collections and Gifts.” Our outreach offering and unpledged contributions were nearly $29,000 below our revised budget. Pledge payments were more significant still—coming in $99,000 below our revised budget to date. This deficit, though concerning, does not overshadow our gratitude for all of you who gave generously and whose $479,000 in pledge payments have made possible the programming that we continue to offer in these especially trying times. We recognize the financial hardships that prohibit some in our community from giving as generously as desired and honor our individual financial discernment.

What these mid-year financials do not reflect are the federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funds that we received from the Small Business Association. In April of 2020, we received a $197,000 loan that had the potential of full forgiveness. We were very pleased to learn this January that we have received full forgiveness and that loan does not need to be repaid. With that assurance, we will see the remaining $147,000 of the PPP funds on our third quarter financials, which will be discussed at our annual FUS Financial Forum on Sunday, May 23.

In addition to this first round of PPP funds, we applied in January 2021 for a second distribution of funds and were recently approved for and received an additional loan of $206,000, which we remain optimistic will also be fully forgiven. This would bring our total PPP funds to over $400,000, a significant relief to our Operating Budget.

I hope you’ll take a minute to review the Statement of Financial Activities included. As always, please don’t hesitate to reach out to myself or the Finance Committee if you have questions about our financial state. You can reach me at monican@fusmadison.org or our Finance Committee Chairperson Adam Simcock at awsimcock@gmail.com.

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Listening Session on Staff Compensation
with the Board of Trustees & the Personnel Committee
Sunday, March 14 @ 11:30 am

Following up on the presentation at the Winter Parish Meeting, the Board of Trustees and Personnel Committee invites you to join them on Sunday, March 14, from 11:30 am – 12:30 pm to dig deeper into the ethical issues surrounding staff compensation. Having committed the congregation to take a thoughtful and systemic approach to compensation, keeping the values of equity, economic justice, and integrity at the heart of deliberations, we look forward to exploring what that means to each of you. Zoom meeting information can be found on the FUS homepage. Look forward to seeing you there.
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<th>Q1 &amp; Q2 Actual</th>
<th>Q1 &amp; Q2 ORIGINAL Budget</th>
<th>Q1 &amp; Q2 REVISED Budget</th>
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Wheel of Life
Congratulations to Creal Zearing and Matthew Doyle Olson on the birth of their daughter, Adeline Elise Zearing, on Christmas morning. Welcome to the world, Adeline, we can’t wait to meet you!

Several of our members have had recent hospitalizations and we send them our love and strength as they begin the road of healing. Our thoughts are with Helena McGevna, Peggy Larson, and Hannah Lee. May they all be feeling much better soon!

We send our love to Dean and Meghan Hessler as they grieve the passing of Dean’s father, Ronald Hessler, Sr., on February 3. May the many memories of this remarkable man bring peace in the days to come.

March Sustainable Saturday Night
Join us for the next Sustainable Saturday Night on March 27 at 6 pm. It will feature a program about Indigenous-led resistance to the extraction industries in Wisconsin. Mine and pipeline proposals threaten both the ecosystems of native ancestral and ceded lands, as well as traditional hunting and gathering rights that should be protected by treaties. Come learn about the growing resistance that is being led by native peoples in northern Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. This event is co-sponsored by Our Wisconsin Revolution, Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice, and other Building Unity groups. Watch for links to this event in the Red Floors.

Climate Change Talk with Bob Lindmeier
On Saturday, March 20, the FUS Sustainability Team brings us a presentation by WKOW-TV’s Senior Chief Meteorologist, Bob Lindmeier. Mr. Lindmeier has been in the field of meteorology for over 50 years and brings a wealth of scientific information about what is happening to our climate as well as what he predicts will happen through the rest of this century if we don’t make drastic changes to the way that we are burning carbon. After the presentation, the FUS Sustainability Team will hold a “Sharing Circle” where participants can learn more about the Sustainability Team and the Team can learn more about what people would like from them.

First Friday Film on March 5 @ 6:30 pm
The First Unitarian Society MOSES Ministry Team invites you to watch this documentary film which explores the growing movement to end the inherent economic and racial inequalities of cash bail. Following the virtual film showing, there will be a Zoom discussion with: Dee Hall of Wisconsin Watch, Kelli Thompson, a Wisconsin public defender, and Pam Oliver, professor emeritus of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin. The team encourages you to watch with us starting at 6:30 pm, and then join us via Zoom for the discussion at 7:35 pm. Register here for the film: https://fusmadison.org/event/first-friday-film-3.

Interested in joining the FUS Board of Trustees?
The Board of Trustees has some upcoming openings and would like to know if you have an interest in serving. Time commitment varies, but is typically limited to one monthly, two-hour meeting along with some outside work and possible involvement on a committee. This is an exciting time for FUS and board service will be very exciting. If you are interested or have questions, please reach out to Joe Kremer, chair of the Nominations Committee, at fusnominations@gmail.com by Friday, March 12.
A MONTH OF SERVICES
Sunday @ 10 am at www.fusmadison.org

Sunday, March 7
“Making FUS Our House”
with Rev. Roger Bertschausen, Interim Minister

Seventy years ago, Max C. Otto, a renowned professor of philosophy at UW Madison and a member of First Unitarian Society, gave the sermon for the dedication service of the new Meeting House. It was a landmark, challenging sermon then. It stands the test of time and is still challenging seventy years later. We will celebrate this milestone event all those years ago with a reflection on Professor Otto’s message for FUS—in 2021. Works for solo piano, organ, and harp by McPartland, Wood, and Zaerr; and a Civil Rights-era Freedom Song sung by the FUS Virtual Choir.

Sunday, March 14
“The Challenge of Partnership”
with Rev. Roger Bertschausen, Interim Minister

Around 125 Unitarian congregations including, First Unitarian Society, had sister churches in Transylvania in the early 1900s. American Unitarians gradually lost interest in these partnerships. Memories faded here—including at FUS where it’s not clear which church was FUS’s partner. Our Transylvanian kinfolk didn’t forget. And they’ve been waiting for us to lose interest since the partnership movement revived in the early 1990s. At its heart, partnership is an opportunity for fidelity and commitment. In recognition of St. Patrick’s day, Celtic folk songs for harp, piano, and multitrack “choir.”

Sunday, March 21
“Saying Yes to Life”
with Rev. Roger Bertschausen, Interim Minister

“Just as long as I have breath, I must answer ‘Yes to life’” starts one of the hymns in our hymnbook. Well, that’s easier said than done! This last year has certainly challenged this daily spiritual task. What are some tools for this task? Music staff will perform a variety of selections, including several honoring Women’s History Month.

Sunday, March 28
“Who and Whose Are You?”
with Rev. Kelly J. Crocker, Minister of Congregational Life

As we contemplate commitment, we will take some time to think about the commitments we make to ourselves in our journey to figuring out who we individually are in this life. And in recognition of the wisdom of Quaker teacher, Douglas Steere, who reminds us, “You can’t be a person by yourself,” we will also reflect on the commitments we make to one another in the building of this larger life we share. Assistant Music Director Linda Warren will perform solo selections honoring Women’s History Month, plus two “virtual choir” performances by the Cherub Choir, Choristers, and Teen Choir.
Let us covenant with one another
to keep faith with the source of life
knowing that we are not our own,
earth made us.

Let us covenant with one another
to keep faith with the community of resistance
never to forget that life can be saved
from that which threatens it
by even small bands of people
choosing to put into practice
an alternative way of life.

And let us covenant with one another
to seek for an ever deeper awareness
of that which springs up inwardly in us.

Even when our hearts are broken
by our own failure
or the failure of others
cutting into our lives,
Even when we have done all we can
and life is still broken,
there is a Universal Love
that has never broken faith with us
and never will.

This is the ground of our hope,
and the reason we can be bold
in seeking to fulfill the promise.