

**"On the road together"**  
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We are the Shoreline Unitarian Universalist church. "Whoever you are, and wherever you are on **your** life's journey, you are welcome here!" I am welcome; you are welcome. We are traveling this road together. I've been on the road a short time, not even one year. Many of you have been on this road since the beginning.

So when was the beginning? Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Church was founded in 1966. It's members wanted to build a strong and enthusiastic liberal religious community in the North Seattle area. This religious community was launched by the bigger University Unitarian church of Seattle. "The new church was comprised mostly of University professors and wives. They selected their members from those who were in the Shoreline zip code in order to create the new church. These were very early years, a very socially activist group. In fact, they were running an underground abortion referral group."

I have learned this story by talking to some of the folks who have been here a long time. This is oral history. I am listening. These long time members are telling me what they remember as important. What I will share with you this morning is just a part of the many stories that exist in the memory of congregation members.

I was at the Sr. lunch on Friday where even more memories came spilling out. I tell you, this Sr. group has a lot of fun tales to tell. Clint, one of the founding members, sitting at the lunch table, started telling us that once the church had property, he took his truck and picked up portable buildings to put on the property as the first temporary buildings. Those portables are still being used. Wow, Clint, you really started something. But that is getting ahead of our story.

In the beginning, the story goes, "They needed about 70 people to qualify as a church, not a fellowship. " This new group chose to make a **big** commitment, instead of starting small. This sounds like people with a vision!! Would they be able to succeed?

**Fortunately**, There was good planning, and good times. Of course, they had to raise money in order to buy property. And, this new community did just that; they were on the property within a couple of years. They bought about 2 ½ acres, which backed up to the freeway. In the first few years the church community was composed of families and a huge number of children." At this point they had a congregation, a piece of property, a church school, and a minister.

**Unfortunately**, he didn't stay long. Since many people in the congregation were able leaders; some were teachers used to speaking to groups, they were able to manage sermons until another minister could be hired.

**Fortunately**, the second minister stayed for about 10 years. The church grew for a while...a lot of stuff was going on.

**Unfortunately**, the membership began to drop. They had started with 120 members, now they were at about 60.

**Fortunately**, "Several lay people rallied to" the **spirit** of sustaining the church," in spite of this setback. There were some half time ministers, some shared ministry with an Everett UU church, until they had no minister at all. Membership was down to 40.

Would this fledgling Church recover? Could it grow again?

Perhaps you are thinking, as I did when I heard this story. What kept this church community going? Perhaps it was the vision they had of their faith community and the covenant, or promise to each other to realize that vision? Unitarian Universalism is based on covenanting relationships. This means that the community agrees to walk together. UUs are not sustained by a hierarchy of district decision makers and Bishops. There is no ecclesial council that makes decisions for us. Once a church is established it must create an autonomous, self-sustaining community, linked to other autonomous UU faith communities. The link is the common values we share.

Conrad Wright, has written some excellent books about the history of Unitarian Universalism. I quote from his book, Walking Together,<sup>1</sup> Faith communities are sustained by "a consciousness of a common past; (it is) a force that strengthens loyalties to the group." "The transmission of culture from one generation to the next is essential." That is what we are doing here, this morning. -- Telling the story of our past. We are transmitting the culture this church established more than forty years ago. I have begun, but there is way more to tell. Ask those sitting around you later today, or at other times!!

"Whoever you are, and wherever you are on your life's journey, you are welcome here!"

Covenant is not a new way of being together. We learn about the covenant the Hebrew people had with their God. The Hebrew Bible stories are ancient oral stories, told over and over again for a reason. The stories emphasized that as long as they remained faithful to their God and God's requirements for behavior, they would be taken care of, rescued from enemies and calamities. These ancient stories of

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, Conrad. Walking Together, Polity and Participation in Unitarian Universalist churches. P.115

Abraham, Jonah, and Job were repeated to confirm their belief that unquestioning faith would result in rewards.

But the definition of covenant has changed considerably in the thousands of years since the Hebrew Bible was written. Unitarian Universalists directly inherit **their** definition of covenant as it is set forth in The Cambridge Platform --- a document drawn up by Puritans in Massachusetts in 1648.

"Covenant is a promise, not a statement of belief."

We covenant together, as one faith community. The principle of covenant is the same. The goal is different. **Our** covenant is about our journey together. We acknowledge each person's experience and free will in determining what statements about individual beliefs have value for each person. We covenant to respect each other on their journey through life, as long as our principles are respected and acknowledged.

Our Principles and Purposes are "a spiritual path we try to follow," "and when we fail to live up to them, we beg forgiveness and begin again." The Cambridge Platform defined covenant to include promises for mutual support. In other words, covenant means "**We are all in this together**, building a better world." It's about valuing our religious community."

"Whoever you are, and wherever you are on your life's journey, you are welcome here!"

I have to wonder, what would your life be like if the early Shoreline group had given up when things got tough -- If Shoreline was not here any more?

In one of our chalice circles, one member spoke about the importance of her friendships here. She realized how mobile our world has become; it is a challenge to keep up friendships, in our neighborhoods, in our work place. The church provides connection to friends – over time and life events.

Another person told me that Going to Seabeck was like being in a big extended family. People did not stay with their own nuclear family, the ones they drove over with. They intermixed, so that the Dad from one family played with child from another. The grandma from one family played with friends from another family. People felt comfortable mingling with all different people of all different ages. This happens only in a trusted community...

Speaking of the church community being on a journey together, let's get back to our story. We know the ending of the story, because we are here today, sitting side-by-side, gathering in worship together.

When our story begins again, the church community had hired a Music Director, Julia Black. We know her. She is still here, performing

music for us!! **In spite of this good news**, the membership was now down to 40. There was no minister. There were no new children to sustain a religious education program. Good worship planning kept things going, led by the lay worship team, and now the addition of professional music. This was a journey. The dictionary gives us this definition: A journey is a gradual passing from one state to another regarded as more advanced, for example, from innocence to mature awareness. They had journeyed on a road from excitement regarding new beginnings to the mature awareness that this church could fold – be no more.

The year was 1986. The church was 20 years old. What would they choose to do? With such small membership, they had to make a decision: Close the church? Or sell “the pasture.” ?

**Fortunately**, the members in 1987 decided to sell the pasture and hire a full time minister rather than quit. The members proved to be rebels!! “We’re going for broke!!” **what a remarkable history**. The UUA did not really approve. However the constitution of the UUA specifically “declares and affirms the independence and autonomy” of local churches; and elsewhere it recognizes and affirms that member churches alone have the right to call and ordain their ministers.”<sup>2</sup>

Many of those rebels are sitting here with us today. They were determined this church would not fail. Thank you for your courage and commitment!!

They made the choice....**sink or swim**. It could have gone either way!!

I have a memory of a church I grew up in. It was a really important community to me as I wandered through my Jr. High and Sr. High years. I remember the other young people in that small group. It was probably the first time I ever knew someone socially who had handicaps. Our youth leaders were terrific. I went to summer camp with that group. As an only child, it was a very important formative time. I had fun with a special boy I met there. He didn’t go to the same school as I did, so we didn’t have that larger social arena to sort out. We just had fun, along with a little beginner’s romance too!!

It’s been a long time since I attended that church, but I remember it with great fondness. It probably saved me during that important developmental teen-age time!! But I began to wonder, what is it like now? Who is that faith community serving now?

Just last year, when my youngest daughter moved to Los Angeles, her post office box address was on Robertson Boulevard. I remembered, that’s where my church had been. So we googled my

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 66

Methodist church on Robertson boulevard. No luck. What could have happened? One day, after we had a sumptuous breakfast in Beverly Hills (that's still there), we drove up and down Robertson Boulevard. And there was my church. Only it wasn't a church any more.

**Unfortunately**, It was a synagogue!! The building was immediately recognizable, the entrance, the stucco archway, even the steeple. But my church was no longer there. I felt a little sad!!

**This** church has a different story:

1988 part of the property was sold.

1989 the congregation started a search process.

**fortunately**

1990 a full time pastor was hired, His name –the Reverend Thomas Anastasi!!

I can only imagine the feelings of those people who had chosen to take the risk --- That feeling of elation that was felt earlier when a brand new church was launched in 1966. This faith community, journeying together had again made an affirmative choice about their own destiny.

“Whoever you are, and wherever you are on your life’s journey, you are welcome here!”

I am imagining the feelings in the community about their decision. Perhaps their feelings about this journey are mirrored in the words of John Murray, one of our early Unitarians,

“Go out into the highways and by-ways.

Give the people something of your **new vision**.

You may possess a small light, but uncover it and let it shine,

Use it in order to bring more light and understanding

to the hearts and minds of men and women.

Give them not hell, but hope and courage;

Preach the kindness and everlasting love of God.”<sup>3</sup>

Selling property and searching for a full time minister was a bold step. They all fell in love with Thomas. He had the energy they needed. This church community regained its strength and vigor under the inspirational leadership of Thomas and continued strength and determination of the members. This church has a history of determination to survive, to take risks. Many people who began with Shoreline are still with the Church. It has a stable population. I am meeting more and more members whose children now go to the

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<sup>3</sup> Singing the Living tradition, Unitarian Universalist Hymanl #704.

church. This is strength; there has been change since the arrival of Thomas. The size of the community has grown to more than 170 members. You now have a children's program, led by a paid Religious Education director, Scott Richards, and a focus on music, with two wonderful musical ensembles. "Thomas was dynamic enough that people were attracted to the church." Said my informer.

They outgrew their old building, holding two services each Sunday. It was a struggle to get a new building. They hired an architect, who drew up plans for them.

**Unfortunately** , they did not have enough money to implement those plans.

**Fortunately**, They decided not to give up. They ordered a kit and built the present church building, which is a Geodesic dome. On May 18, 2002, they occupied this new building, built by the hands and bodies of many church members. Who are we now? We are an energetic and passionate group of religious liberals. We gather in community in a common search for and celebration of the values and understandings that give meaning to our lives. Our membership is a blend of families, couples and single people, from infants to retired folks.

What is the new vision -- of the road ahead?

"Whoever you are, and wherever you are on your life's journey, you are welcome here!" We are on the road together, walking the road, called Shoreline Unitarian Universalist church.

CHILDREN'S STORY: "FORTUNATELY," BY REMY CHARLIP.