

“Reflections: A Year in Our Home”©

Sermon by Rev. Duffy Peet

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A year ago tomorrow I stood in this pulpit and delivered my first sermon in this, our newly renovated building. 126 people, including children, attended that service. It was obvious from the large turnout that there was a great deal of excitement about being in our new home. I wonder how many of you were here that day? Those of you who were present for that service likely recall that before the physical remodeling got underway, the projected move-in date was January or February. As it became apparent that we wouldn't get in by when we had hoped, the anticipation grew with each passing month.

The members and friends of this Fellowship had been waiting a long time for a home of our own you see. When I say a long time, I am not talking in terms of a few years. I am talking about decades. More than 50 years ago there was a call by members of this Fellowship to get a building of its own. The anticipation leading up to the service a year ago then had been building for a very long time. Now that we've been in our building for a year I think it is appropriate to reflect on what it has been like for us to be in our own home.

Before I begin that reflection however, I want to say thank you to all who made it possible for us to be in this building today. I am not going to attempt to name each person individually. I would also like to suggest that each of us consider saying thank you. If you don't know who the people were that got us to this point, I encourage you to ask around. It won't take long to learn who helped us get here.

And now let's take time to reflect on the year that has passed. The Sunday after that first service was the UUFB fall retreat at Rockhaven. The older children loved the chance to experience the high ropes course. The attendance at the service in this building that Sunday was only about half what it had been the prior week. Then on Sunday, September 24th we held a building dedication service in the morning and an open house in the afternoon. The open house drew clergy and members of congregations throughout the Bozeman area. And we had neighbors drop by to see how the project turned out and what UUFB is all about. Not too many weeks later winter hit, and what a winter it was. It didn't take us long to learn that our parking lot could be quite treacherous. The black ice that forms on the north side of the building was a challenge for young and old alike. Volunteers soon stepped forward to offer valet service to help people get into the building safely. And a cadre of parking lot shovelers began clearing snow and ice often on a several times a week basis. Each of the people who cleared snow and helped people get safely into the building deserve a hardy thank you as well. People in this Fellowship step up to help one another.

We have also reached out beyond our building and those who are part of our Fellowship. Here are some examples. When we learned that a significant number of refugees would be arriving in Missoula with little or nothing to begin a new life there, this Fellowship moved into action. We collected and delivered a large load of household and personal items to be distributed to the new Montanan's. And every second Sunday this year we have given away the Sunday offering to organizations that are helping others. Along with giving away the offering of the second Sunday, this year the Board voted to

give away the offerings on the fifth Sundays of the month as well. In the past year we gave more than \$9,000 to organizations such as the Warming Center, the Gallatin Valley Mental Health Center, Haven, and the Montana Immigrant Justice Alliance. Part of this money also went to assist victims of Hurricane Harvey. Activities such as these are examples of what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. They also exemplify what Mark Morrison-Reed was referring to in our reading this morning. Here I quote, "There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others. Once felt, it inspires us to act..." And act we do. We act to make the values contained in the Seven Principles come alive in the world.

As is typical in the life of any congregation, some of the people who attend services or meetings have changed since last August. This year for example we had a founding member of the Fellowship die as well as a long-time member and their spouse move away. Saying goodbye is always difficult. But say goodbye we did. I co-officiated at the memorial service of the founding member. We didn't have enough seating capacity to hold the service in this building, however. And we held a going away celebration and offered well-wishes to the couple who was moving away. There are also many new faces in our midst. Since December 15 people have signed the Fellowship's membership book. That is more than a 10% increase in membership since moving into our building.

I imagine there may be a number of reasons for our growth this year. One could be that the current political situation in our country has motivated some people to seek like-minded, or at least open-minded, communities to be connected with and supported by. Another factor that may have influenced our growth in numbers is our new home. Now that we have our own building people know where to find us. If you weren't aware, finding us has been an issue. Just this week I had a person tell me that they have been looking for us for three years. They just found us in the past few months. And even with our new building there have been problems with people getting to our building and coming in our doors. For the first several months after we were in our new home Google Maps was directing people to our former office location at Casey's Corner Gas Station on Valley Commons Drive. We did everything that was possible online to get Google Maps to give the correct information but none of it worked. It wasn't until our UUA Regional Representative, Rev. Sarah Schurr, put me in touch with a Google executive who is in charge of Google Maps that we got things taken care of. That Google executive, by the way, is a member of a UU congregation in Washington state. Unitarian Universalism may be a small denomination in terms of numbers, but our numbers don't come close to indicating our reach, our connections, or our influence.

And it wasn't just people who wanted to attend our services that found our new building both functional and welcoming. In mid-April we had congregational leaders from each of the Fellowships in Montana, as well as Sheridan, Wyoming, come here to attend a workshop led by Regional staff members, the Rev. Dr. James Kubal-Komoto and Rev. Sarah Schurr. The workshop was both informative and inspiring to those in attendance. The people who came for the workshop offered many compliments, not only on our beautiful new space but also on our hospitality.

Having our own building has allowed us to hold other important gatherings as well. Gatherings that are more personal in nature. One such event took place in this very room in late June. That was when I officiated at the first wedding in our building. I

had the honor of marrying our member, Logan Henke and our pianist this morning, Erin. It was truly a grand occasion. Would you agree, Erin?

And then there were much more public events, such as the garage sale that was held this weekend. How many of you participated in the sale in one way or another? Late last week I had quite a few people ask me if I was prepared to hold the worship service in the parking lot this morning. Thankfully that wasn't necessary. For those of you who didn't get a chance to see the sanctuary and the social hall this week, let me tell you that both rooms, as well as the entryway, were packed full. The profits from the sale will go to the Fellowship's operating fund. What didn't sell will be donated to appropriate and worthy organizations. Everyone who gave to or assisted with the garage sale also deserves a heartfelt thank you from all of us.

Another thing that deserves mention this morning is the decision to hold services every Sunday during the summer. I don't know for certain, but this may be the first time in the Fellowship's history that people were able to attend a service every Sunday of the year. How many of you attended at least one of the services from June 17th through last Sunday? Before the Board made the decision to hold services all summer, concerns were expressed that there might not be enough support for such a change. I want to tell you that those concerns have been put to rest. An average of 73 adults attended the ten summers services this year. That compares with an average of 84 adults who attended services from January through May. And 73 people is more than half of the Fellowship's membership. There are a good number of UU congregations that would love to have regular attendance numbers that come close to half of their membership. We accomplished that and more as we kept our doors open every Sunday this summer. On top of that, we have UU ministers from other parts of the country who were eager for the opportunity to come here and share their message on a Sunday. This summer we had two such ministers, Rev. Jason Shelton and Rev. Alex Holt. I am already in conversation with several other ministers who have expressed an interest in coming to visit our Fellowship. With our new home and the energy it is generating we are now not only on Google Maps, we are on people's radar, people from near and far.

I want to mention one more very important thing that occurred this year. In January, the members of this Fellowship voted to adopt a new Mission Statement which is located on the front of your Order of Service. It states: "We: Welcome Diversity, Act for Justice, Foster Spiritual Growth, Inspire Compassion, Nurture Community." There is a lot of mission packed into those few words. Those who were present at the congregational meeting when this Statement was adopted made it clear though, that there was still something missing—namely, our commitment to protecting the Earth, the home of all life that we are currently aware of. There is a very good chance that our Mission Statement may soon be a bit longer and even more inclusive.

There is so much more that I could mention about this past year. As you can tell, this Fellowship has been an active place these past twelve months. It is good for us to periodically reflect on where we have been. It is important to reflect and to say thank you.

And after a time of reflection it is important to shift focus and to look toward the future. Where are we headed? What will our focus be? Where will we put our energy? In the coming months and years we will discern answers to such questions. It is my hope that some of those answers will come as we create a new Vision Statement, a Vision

Statement that will be our guide, our action map, for the journey that lies ahead. I am reasonably certain that our journey will take us many places and in many directions. In the coming year and probably years, we will know where our place is, right here in this building that we now call home.

Blessed be.