

RE-COVENANTING FOR A NEW YEAR

I have not often made New Year's Resolutions. I understand that some people find them helpful. Where I used to live I would see several new faces of people running, walking or riding bikes the first few days of the year and then over the next few days it would be back to just the regulars. I'm not saying that they failed on their resolutions, but it sure looked like they did. Perhaps they joined gyms or went to other places. Too often, resolutions are a set-up for failure, especially when they are ill conceived and will require follow through that is not likely to happen.

My approach to the New Year is not to start habits out of thin air that will quickly be forgotten due to my natural tendency to keep doing those things which have worked well enough. I'm sure there are lots of things I could do differently that might be better, healthier, wiser, but if the changes required are too drastic I probably will fall quickly back into old habits. Instead, I would rather emphasize the things I do well and let other changes follow from my commitment to be the best me I can!

Similarly, I do not challenge you to make big changes in your lives and the life of the congregation that are against your better nature. You all bring wonderful gifts to life in this New Year, and this congregation has been here in Stockton for a hundred years. What I invite you to do this morning is to let go of the struggles of the past year, to reclaim the best in your lives and in the life of this congregation, and to re-covenant to make this congregation the best that it can be as a continuation of the best that it has always been.

Now that doesn't mean that nothing will change or that things are always going to flow easily, for it will take work to discover the best that this congregation has to offer and then project it into the future.

The mission of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Stockton is to nurture spiritual/ethical growth, to be inclusive of all people, and to be an active voice of conscience in the greater community.

I really like the way the mission of First UU Church is stated. It is simple, concise, but quite broad in scope. It can cover a myriad of ideas, programs, sermons, and projects. It is a wonderful starting place for living out the Principles of Unitarian Universalism. The challenge of course is to make this a beginning rather than an end. If this is indeed our mission, then it should be leading us somewhere, shaping our congregational ministries, helping us to be the best possible expression of this congregational entity that has existed for a hundred years here in Stockton.

At the Ministerial Start-up and Planning Session in October, we talked about several aspects of the life of the congregation. The summary sent by Rev. Jeanelyse Adams from the district included these items:

- Becoming a visible force in the community
- Shine the light of the congregation
- Be friendly and welcoming
- Strengthen internal relationships
- Increase Membership
- Increase care and support of each other in the congregation
- Focus on Childhood Education and our DRE
- Intergenerational Activities
- Strategic Priorities: knowing who we are and where we want to go
- Need 1 person to volunteer per week

These are all things that this congregation has done before, is doing and will need to do in the future. There is nothing new or different here, just reminders of things that need more attention at this time. The challenge is for us to find new or old but more effective ways of doing all the things that we will need to do to be the best we can at our mission. That is why this is a Re-Covenanting Service, not a First Covenanting Service. We are not starting or starting over so much as we are building on the efforts of thousands of people who have built this congregation over its first century of ministry to Stockton.

So this morning, I want to remind you of your strengths and challenge you to do a bit more in the coming year. Together we can make this a great year in this second century of First UU's ministry. We may not accomplish everything we hope to do in this year, but we can accomplish much. We will probably not become a mega-church, even by UU standards during this year, but we can do much. We may continue to struggle a bit financially during this year, but we can make progress. We may not solve all our own problems, let alone the problems of Stockton, the Delta, California, the United States, and the world, but we can make a difference. Sometimes we may each become discouraged, but together in this covenantal community we can strengthen and encourage each other to continue working for the betterment of our community and of society. We are not alone, we have each other and we have the association of Unitarian Universalist congregations.

This is a friendly and welcoming congregation. We are musical and we are articulate. We have made a difference in Stockton in years past, and we will continue to make a difference this year and in years to come. Our members have been and are active in the community politically, culturally, and educationally. We touch health and welfare systems, educational systems at many levels, other government systems, and various aspects of society in Stockton and beyond. We are actually quite well connected for a small congregation!

We are committed to social justice and education and to the emotional, Spiritual, and psychological growth of our members. We are hopeful in that we see the more positive ways that the world may develop. We believe in humanity, democracy, and that goodness will triumph over evil and greed. Though we may hold a variety of beliefs about God and Heaven or the lack thereof, we keep our energies focused on this world and the possibilities that it offers. Above all we are a community of individuals joining together freely on the basis of our shared values and our commitment to the principles of Unitarian Universalism.

Out of our common vision and our sense of shared mission and our community based caring and interest in each other, I invite you to briefly share a few words about your hopes, dreams, and wishes for yourself and for First Unitarian Universalist Church in this year just begun. You may come to the front, or wait for a microphone to come to you.

Thank You for sharing!

It is in the light of our common values that we covenant with each other to make the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Stockton a safe and welcoming home to all those who choose to join together here. We hold no single belief, creed, doctrine, or dogma other than our love for each other and all humankind and our effort to live by the values expressed in the Unitarian Universalist Principles. Building on our own rich heritage as a congregation, our individual beliefs and efforts, and upon the shared wisdom of the many religious traditions that have influenced and will influence Unitarian Universalism, we join together today in re-affirming our covenant made to each other.

I invite you now to join me in speaking the Covenant for the New Year printed in the program!