

“For What It’s Worth”

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Unitarian Universalist Metro Atlanta North

Building Dedication Sunday

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“What’s this fricken-fracken church worth? The whole fricken-fracken thing? Buildings, land, everything? Give me a round figure!”

These were the words of Dave Dugan as he threw a briefcase of money on the table – a half million dollars that he was carrying with him to cover the payroll of his construction business. Dugan stopped off at his church’s board meeting on his way to work and had become so frustrated by meandering negotiations around potholes in the parking lot and paper towels at the annual seder that he got fed up. He was ready to do away with the whole thing. He popped open his brief case and placed bundles of money on the table and screamed out, “Just give me the deed and it’s done.”

Silence. Stunned silence. “What would you do with it?” asked one board member.

I’m gonna level this fricken-fracken church and haul it to the fricken-fracken dump. And I’ll use the land for the cemetery you guys are headed toward in these meetings of the living dead. I’m gonna put up a fricken-fracken monument to the unknown God.

Robert Fulgum uses this story to recount the tirade once thrown by a member of his church when action was stalled and the plan was not going his way. Dugan was obviously a doer. A man of action. He loathed waiting. He liked to work alone.

When I look out at the world, I can understand Dave Dugan. Like him, I like action. Like him, I hate waiting. Especially when I look out and see how much the world around us wants and needs to come together. When I look out on international terrorism mounting and local incivility growing. When I see systems of care letting so many fall through the cracks. And especially when I hear the kind of charge our youth just offered us asking what we’re going to do about drugs, or the environment, or intolerance or making the choice toward cooperation rather than individualism. For these things I hate waiting.

I am prone to believe that we were meant to come together and heal the divides that haunt us. And I am prone to believe that the church is the primary vehicle for being able to do so. And I am prone to see Unitarian Universalism in a unique situation to live up to this charge. Because I am prone to understanding Unitarian Universalism as that faith which believes in one planet (Unitarian) bringing together all people (Universalism).

I built a church once. I was five or six when the UU church I grew up in near Los Angeles got too big for it’s space and had to build. I helped. Mostly by waiting. I waited for my mom while she attended meetings. Building meetings. Finance meetings. Long Range Plan meetings. Interior design committee meetings. Meetings I have become intimately re-familiar with lately. I offered a lot of patience. A few ideas. Encouragement. For a year, with my RE classroom, I donated part of my allowance to the capital campaign. And when the time came to move and landscape I put in a lot of seven year old muscle.

Everything we have done here at UUMAN – everything to get us to this point – has come from these very things. Patience, ideas, a good dose of our allowance, encouragement, muscle. But the most important thing shouldn’t be overlooked. Because it is the very thing that made the wait worthwhile – seeing that

people could learn to come together. That we could face real problems while seeing that we are really one planet, bringing together all people.

I confess it has been long. And hard. And I admit to having gotten frustrated and silently wondering ‘what’s this fricken-fracken church worth? The whole fricken-fracken thing?’ And I can look at it now and tell you confidently that this building is a cool million. Throw in the other two buildings, the land and some expensive pervious pavement and you get maybe two mil. Throw in a trunk filled with costumes that we keep in the basement, one of the finest collection of chipped coffee mugs on the planet and four boxes of half burned candles in the worship storage closet and the price goes up.

But if you throw in a place where our children feel safe around people other than their parents; if you throw in a youth group that is finding their voice and forging a responsible framework of values to make a difference in the world; if you throw in a slew of people who would go through the dead of night to know you’re okay; if you throw in the knowledge that this place builds justice and changes people’s lives – then it all becomes priceless.

What’s this church worth? It will never be measured in money. It’s measured in work that is worthy, in individuals growing to the size of their dreams, in the cooperation and trust required to do something significant with our lives. In knowing we are safe because we are with people who have stood in the trenches with us, sleeves rolled up. In knowing that the more we come together, the further we reach into the world. And it’s measured in the stories our children will someday tell of the church they built.

Congratulations, everyone, for getting this far along the way.

To the Glory of Life.