

**“Integrity is a Team Sport”  
a talk by Rev. Dr. David Breeden**

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at First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis

**INTRODUCTION: Location, Location, Location**

The story goes that in a mountain range far, far away a holy man once lived near the top of the tallest mountain. In the valley below was a village. The holy man was the very picture of peace and serenity.

The climb up the mountain was arduous, but the wise man was very wise, and so villagers frequently made the climb to seek advice and enlightenment from the wise man.

After several years, the mayor of the village climbed the mountain and said to the holy man, “Sir, you do a great service to the people of the village, and we all value your sage advice. However, the climb up the mountain is very treacherous. Please consider coming down the mountain and dwelling in the village for the safety of your followers.”

The holy man thought for some time about the proposal and finally agreed to come down the mountain.

When he arrived in the village, a large crowd had gathered, everyone jostling and pushing trying to get as close as possible to the holy man. He was shoved this way and that way, and soon he was shoving back.

He even had to slap a woman’s hand a couple of times . . .

And suddenly everyone, including the man, realized that he was just another guy with a short temper.

The moral of this story is . . . location, location, location!

**ONE: Building Supportive Communities**

There is something about a place.

As you've probably seen, there are lots of studies that indicate that people who regularly attend houses of worship are happier, healthier, and live longer. Often in these studies, correlation is mistaken for causation. It isn't being religious that makes people happier, healthier, and live longer, it's being religious about getting up and going somewhere; it's about ritual and community.

And I'm not talking about incense or bowing as ritual. I'm talking about getting up on a Sunday morning, sprucing yourself up a bit, and joining in a like-minded community of people. I'm talking about showing up and sharing and giving and doing and thinking and debating and learning. I'm talking about greeting; and singing; and cooking; and teaching; and giving.

Here. In this location. A place of hope and light.

More than a century ago an idea sprouted in the rich, free soil of Unitarianism when John Dietrich first named his new "religion without God" Humanism. Dietrich dreamed of supportive communities that would encourage reflection and social engagement. A place, as he phrased it—

a common meeting ground for all . . . rich and poor, learned and unlearned, theist and atheist, on the single common basis of religious fellowship.

Dietrich called it "religious fellowship," we nowadays call it "community." And that's still what we're about here well over a century after the people of First Unitarian Society embraced that dream. We strive to be that "common meeting ground" for "rich and poor, learned and unlearned, theist and atheist."

Here, we strive to be a supportive community that encourages both reflection and engagement.

We understand that it's a lot easier to be a hermit on a mountain top than one among a group. The hermit in the story only had integrity as long as he was isolated. But we human beings are a gregarious species. We need to bump into people. We need our attitudes adjusted by interacting with others. We need our ideas, ideals, and our integrity tested and affirmed by others.

Here, in this place, elderly people interact with children, perhaps for the only time in a week. Here, children interact with elderly people, perhaps for the only time in a week. Here, we meet people differently abled; people with struggles and joys that we have never even imagined. People with ideas and experiences we have never even imagined.

We join together, in a covenant—an agreement about how we hope to treat each other—

*to dwell together in peace;  
to seek the truth in love;  
and to help one another.*

Location. Location. Location.

## **TWO: FUS, the Foundation and Beacon of Congregational Humanism**

This is a place of hope and light. And that's the theme for our pledge campaign this year. After Assembly today, head downstairs and find out what our Stewardship Team has planned.

I hope you agree that things look prosperous around here on Sunday mornings. The space is clean. The rooms are set up for meetings. There's coffee and tea available. We have art on the walls. We have an Assembly that's been planned well in advance. We have quality programming for all ages. We offer talks and programs that are unique to a congregational humanist community—in the churches across the street, they don't talk about the things we talk about in the way that we talk about them.

We have a warm meal available every week. We have special-interest programming through the week. We offer opportunities to put your values into action. A offer a way for you to increase your impact on the things you care about.

Yes, we look prosperous around here. And, believe me, the Finance Committee, and our Finance Director, and our Board of Trustees, and our Foundation Board take financial responsibility very, very seriously.

And, we on staff, we do our best to provide the best place and the best programming at the lowest possible cost.

When we do surveys asking you what needs to change around here, we nearly always get the same answer: "More!" More of what we already do.

We don't tend to talk much about money around here. On Sunday mornings, we have guests, and many of us have learned that it's not polite to talk about money when you have guests. Consequently, if you aren't in a leadership position, you probably don't know how all this works.

Those of you who have been around for awhile know that we are finishing up a capital campaign that raised nearly four million dollars to upgrade this building. As with most renovation projects, we ended up spending a bit more than our members pledged, so we were faced with a projected shortfall.

Most of you *don't* know that we got a bequest from FUS member John Bassett. Many of you remember John singing in the choir. John loved music and he loved this place. He left FUS money in his will. And part of that money [will help make](#) up the capital campaign shortfall. As long as the balance of the pledges come in as expected, FUS will be totally debt free by this time next year. John's bequest helped make this happen.

(Oh, and BTW, remember to fulfill your Capital Campaign pledge if you haven't already. Please! We're still counting on you.)

We look prosperous, but a cursory look doesn't reveal the things we have that are stuck together with paperclips and chewing gum.

For example, Facilities Manager Tim Roehl and I are the only full-time employees here. Everyone else is working less than full-time hours at a less-than-full-time salary. It would be great if we could get our Director of Religious Education up to full-time. It would be great if we could increase the hours that Rev. Kelli spends on social justice initiatives. As of now, she's only paid to do that fifteen hours a week.

In addition, the Unitarian Universalist Association posts suggested salaries for various positions in various areas based on the numerical size of the congregation. We are at the bottom of salary suggestion for every position we have. In addition to that, we try – but often don't succeed–in giving staff cost-of-living increases each year.

I hope you agree that we have a great staff here. Everyone on staff could be making more money somewhere else. We make up for that somewhat with a positive work environment; flexible hours; and a generous paid-time-off policy. But those things only go so far . . .

Then there's the programming. The music scene in the Twin Cities is amazing, but we don't have much in the budget to get outside musicians.

We pride ourselves on finding informed and inspiring speakers for our programs, but the budget for outside speakers is almost non-existent.

A furnishings budget is completely nonexistent: Upkeep and replacement funds for chairs, tables, kitchenware, glassware, electronic devices . . . we don't even have a budget line for these expenses.

I could go on, but I won't. You get the picture.

### **THREE: A Free Search**

As you know, in consultation with members of the congregation, our Board recently wrote a new mission statement. It's short 'n' sweet:

First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis is a congregational humanist community dedicated to promoting a free search for truth, meaning, and justice.

A free search for truth, meaning, and justice in a congregational setting. That's our mission. We have broken executing that mission down into four programming components:

Youth Development and Connection (that's our Religious Explorers program, headed up by Allison Wyeth)

Adult Enrichment and Connection (that's our adult programming, headed up by Rev. Jim Foti)

Social Justice (that's our social justice programming, headed up Rev. Kelli Clement)

Institutional Resilience (that's taking care of our physical plant, headed up by Tim Roehl)

Each of those areas has a set of goals. We aren't setting those programs up in competition. We want to be able to think clearly about our mission and how to achieve it. We need to have goals and we need to have the ability to constantly monitor and update how we are achieving those goals.

#### **FOUR: Integrity in Community**

Last week I proposed the notion that "integrity" is a match between the inside and the outside. Walking the walk.

Many of you are here today because you have insisted upon integrity. Some were born into a religion that stopped making sense. For some people when that happens, it's all about keeping quiet and staying in line and keeping everything looking normal.

But for many of you, your integrity wouldn't allow you to do that.

Some of you are here because you've tried multiple religions. Maybe they all seemed true to you; maybe they all looked hollow; but your integrity won't allow you to subscribe to any one tradition.

Some of you are here today because you've decided there are no answers. But mystery is cool, and you like to ask questions anyway, as openly as you can.

Some of you are here today because you've never been much interested in religions or philosophies, but you think that human community is important; or that working for justice is the most important thing.

Some of you are here because you grew in this congregation or another one where a free search for truth, meaning, and justice in a congregational setting is how it's always been for you. Those are the lucky ones and how we teach children here.

However you got here, you know that this is a special location. Here we are creating community according to humanist principles. And, no, I'm not going to use any sports metaphors today. By "team," I mean "community."

Here, we are convinced that human beings are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for, and strive toward, a society and a world of mutual care and concern;

a society and a world free of ostracism, and prejudice and cruelty and its consequences.

A society and a world where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence.

This is an ideal, but it is our goal.

The joining of our individuality with a community of interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires the hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.

We believe in living a shared life in a shared world.

And we know that no one can be Humanist alone. Not for very long, anyway.

Humanism is about conversation, relationship, nurturing, and community. Even the sometimes solitary production of art and thought is ultimately about sharing.

Denzel Washington gets in right with the words in your order of service this morning: "At the end it's not about what you have or even what you've accomplished. It's about who you've lifted up, who you've made better. It's about what you've given back."

## **CONCLUSION: A Common Meeting Ground**

The early Humanists dreamed of supportive communities that would encourage reflection and social engagement—"a common meeting ground for all . . . rich and poor, learned and unlearned, theist and atheist, on the single common basis of religious fellowship."

Nowadays we call it "community," yet still, well over a century later, we're about those things here.

The moral of this story is . . . location, location, location!

No one who joined in that dream then is alive today. But what they set in motion is here, now. We'll keep it up next week. And next year. And next decade. And next century.

We are here for the long haul.

Thank you for joining in.