

Seeds for Growth

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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For our cornerstone's anniversary last week, the Membership Committee put together this *Seeds for the Future Card*, along with a special-edition printed order of service, as part of a... church care package – bringing some of the more tangible parts of the church closer to your home.

And just like our church, this package, in turn, is both tangible... as well as representative of an idea. It is both here, and in the future.

Because, right now, it's not quite the right season to plant these seeds, which means they need to be set aside for later, and you'll be invited to do that come spring. Just as our cornerstone was only the beginning of a physical home for a community that had already been around for some time, these seeds are only the beginning of what can become a future project for growth.

When they are planted – in the future – *they* will become the beginnings of future growing marigolds... themselves their own beginnings.

The whole process of germination is in itself a continuum of beginnings, from seed, to sowing, to seedling, flowering, pollinating, fruiting, and seeding again. In a way, it's not entirely clear where the seed ends and the plant begins...

Today, we mark another stage – another beginning – in the lives of... *participants* in our community, who are now being formally acknowledged as members.

And I say *formally*, because in many ways – including official ways – all of these *participants* are in fact *already members* of our church. As of this morning, they have all signed the right papers (including our membership book), they have made a contribution of record to sustaining our community, and they have been actively involved in the life of the congregation. This morning, we have gathered together, in our physical home, and in your homes, as one church, so that we may all say *welcome*, we see you, just as you have seen us, and we are glad to have you with us, in good company.

Unitarian Universalist minister and author, the Rev. Robert Fulghum, has suggested that weddings don't really happen at the wedding ceremony, but rather, a wedding often happens over several days – perhaps weeks, or months – of candid conversation, as partners form a *covenant* regarding their dreams, their aspirations, their values... their problems – and how they might approach them. *That is the real wedding*, he says.

And that's not to say that the wedding *ceremony* doesn't matter – on the contrary, it is an important opportunity to celebrate, and for others to *witness* and *partake* in the promises and vows that a set of partners builds over time.

Just like a partnership into a marriage, the moment of transformation between *participant* and *member* is about as blurry as it might be the case for the seeds in our care package as they transform into a “plant”. The growth and development are ongoing processes without necessarily having a clear practical demarcation – yet we mark it nonetheless.

Some of you will have considered yourselves members long before you signed the papers, or came to a ceremony like this one. And so, we take some time to ensure that you know, and that we know, that you know, that yes, you are here in good company, and in the company that you want to be in.

We also do this as a reminder of the covenant that many of you have already taken on, to share in this ministry, in good company. Today, we make this public witness of the vows and promises – the covenant – that you have been building with this community, and that you will likely *continue to build* into the future. A covenant of shared ministry.

Because a lot of the ministry that happens here is carried out beyond what I do as your settled minister. This afternoon our church voted on a decision about the maintenance of our building – that was *your* job to do. And, leading up to that decision, a fair bit of legwork was carried out by the Property Committee – assessing what our needs (and our building’s needs) might be, seeking out contractors, obtaining quotes, negotiating accessible rates.

I’ve been present for these kinds of discussions, and from time to time may be asked for my perspective, or I may see the need to offer my take on the matter, but for the most part, it was *you* and your peers, as members of this church, who have done – and are commissioned to do – this work.

We can say the same for just about all the other work that happens around here. Even for our Sunday worship services, in which I tend to

take the lead, there are roles for our lay members to be active in, be it assisting during the services themselves, looking after some of the services, or supporting the journey of worship. I share this ministry with you.

Sometimes, that ministry is more visible – I often name the folks who are taking an active role during the Sunday morning service. Other ministries get named and recognized at other times and other places, and some are carried out with more discretion. And we share these ministries, in good company.

The Unitarian and Universalist traditions have shared in a heritage that recognizes what is sometimes called “the priesthood of all believers” – in our communities these days, we might use language such as “the ministry of all the faithful”.

People in my line of work sometimes carry fancy titles like Reverend or pastor, because we have made a career and life commitment of devotion to our tradition, our values, and the service that this entails, but that doesn’t stop any of you from participating on those same goals, as these tasks fit into your lives.

These may be through a named position, such as chair or member of a committee, or by your involvement in the life of the congregation, or by your financial support, or simply, by the gift of your presence in this company. My friends, your shared ministry in this community of faith puts you in good company.

And our new member ceremony this morning, my friends, allows us to consider and contemplate the meaning and significance of being here, among each other, with each other, for each other, in good company.

Your presence this morning, your presence this afternoon, your ongoing participation in the life of this congregation and your willingness to

connect more deeply with each other, and with the world, is part of your ministry in our community of faith.

My friends, without your company, our ministry could not be possible.

My friends you are *in* good company.

My friends you *are* good company.

So may it be,
In Solidarity, in Love, and in Peace
Amen

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Suggested Hymns:

Opening Hymn #290 Bring, O Past, Your Honor

~)-| Words: Charles H. Lyttle, 1884-1980

Music: John Bachus Dykes, 1823-1876

NICEA

Hymn – #295 Sing Out Praises for the Journey

~)-| Words: Mark M. DeWolfe, 1953-1988,

~)-| Music: rev. by Joyce Painter Rice, © 1991 UUA

Music: Henry Purcell, 1659-1695

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

Closing Hymn #298 Wake, Now, My Senses

~)-| Words: Thomas J. S. Mikelson, 1936- , © Thomas J. S. Mikelson

Music: Traditional Irish melody, harmony by Carlton R. Young, 1926- ,
renewal © 1992 Abingdon Press

SLANE