

## **“Mission Not So Impossible”**

Rev. Annie Holmes

Do you remember what you wanted to be when you grew up? Some days does it feel like you are still growing up? Was your dream a clear picture or did the idea of what you wanted to do with your life come slowly, in pieces and maybe not clearly or maybe not even when you were young, but much later in life? Clarity is very important and yet discernment is often elusive. I am reminded of some afternoons when Bille’ and I are trying to decide what to make for dinner. The actual making of the dinner is never as hard as trying to figure out, clarify, what it is we would like to have. A person can flounder most of their life without some clarity about themselves, about the world, the earth, their family. I would venture to say 95% of the problems in our own hearts and in the world come directly from not being able to be clear about how we feel about an issue, how far to go in our actions, what is the next right step in almost any situation. And because of the unclearness we often feel lost, lonely and stuck. We are a culture of lies, half-truths, attempts to make people feel good without telling the truth, fear of the truth. You know the saying, “The truth will set you free?” Well, there is another piece of that statement, first that same truth will make you mad.

In working with people in churches, mostly UU churches, the greatest amount of indecision and lack of honesty seems to reside in an unwillingness, a fear or general malaises about their own gifts. I believe we waste so much time hemming and hawing with ourselves trying not to believe the gifts others see and if we could just believe we could see and also utilize. Clarity is the key. And knowing yourself, personally or as a church is truly the beginning of wisdom.

In the Native American traditions it was believed that there are four personality types that were needed almost at all times for the tribe to be balanced and clear about how to proceed. You needed a visionary, someone to see the whole picture and being able to look in totality for the needs of the tribe. Someone who was not afraid of the future and able to ask the deep, hard questions about where to go next and how to do it. Secondly, you needed a healer so there would be someone to mend bones, move energy, remind people to take their vitamins, in general, to look after the health of the tribe. These people knew the herbs, the healing rituals, the salve and balm of what to do when there was a broken bone, or a broken heart. Thirdly, you needed a teacher, someone who remembered the history, the stories, the folklore and the mechanics of how to do things that needed done. The teacher was unafraid of learning new ways of doing things and bold and brave in their attempts to teach others. And lastly, but certainly not least, you needed a warrior. This person was not a soldier in the sense we have used the word, but rather the one who went into battle against enemies and foes within and without the tribe, and this person was also the protector of the weak, the one who acted as judge in tribal disputes, the one who took on the mantel of finding the truth in a situation and was strong enough, physically and emotionally, to make the truth stick. These four types of people made the tribe safe from within and without so the tribe could prosper. If a tribal leader saw there was one type of gifted person missing, they knew there was going to be trouble and an imbalance in the tribal health. You see, health was all about balance. And balance comes when there is clarity. Clarity of needs. Clarity of gifts. Clarity of how to proceed.

If you look at the mission statement of this church in your Order of Service, you will see that all four personalities are represented. Look at the verbs used; to welcome, to educate, to teach, to be a social justice agent in the world or the actor of personally and collectively social justice issues for UU values, or the warrior. Even the use of the word mission makes me see a visionary. It is all there. Welcome, educate, promote and dream. Those were the words chosen years ago by this church and they have certainly held true. I think we should recite this mission statement once in awhile, so that in time, it will be as familiar to us as our own name.

In 1993 this same church a very brave group of people became visionaries and bought this building and house next door. And for 17 years this building, this site has served the congregation well. But the visionaries of the congregation are rumbling once again. In the wind I hear them. "What now? What could we as a church become now? Is this same setting adequate? Helpful? Are we stuck? Are we clear? Who are we now?"

I truly believe we have yet to define what kind of church we want to be, therefore we are not clear about our identity and therefore cannot leave this building for another site. Do we want to be a social action warrior church, then we may want to be downtown, in the thick of things in the city. Do we want to be a visionary church, then we should think about buying property in the woods and sing and meditate and be hard to find by society. Would we like to be an educational vehicle for the city using our religious diversity to further the cause of religious freedom, then maybe we should be out near the college and link up with an institution of higher learning. If we are not clear what our particular, unique mission is in the world, we will have a difficult time knowing what to do next. And that discrimination can be a burden and a gift. How do 70+ people come to that kind of discernment anyway? And maybe you could be saying to yourself at this point, that maybe we would like to be a piece of all these personality traits. And the point would be; where would we be able to best be the healer, the visionary, the educator and the warrior in this city? Until we are clear and name and sort out our identity, the money won't come, the energy won't come, a buyer for this property will not come.

Who will miss the religious opportunity of a lifetime because they couldn't find us? Or they felt when they visited there wasn't enough room for them? Are we afraid to move ahead because of the possibility of failure? What is failure but a missed opportunity to learn?

Almost every decision you have made in your life has had some element of failure deep inside it. So, why did you continue anyway? Marrying or partnering in faith. Buying your house on faith. Going to school on faith. Having children on faith. Retiring on faith. We never know how events will turn out and yet we continue anyway, don't we? Is that commitment to the future within you the visionary, the educator, the healer or the warrior?

In belonging here, we have been given a secret inheritance. It is now our time to share it with others. There is a secret in receiving an inheritance. The secret is revealed little by little. All of us can look around this room this morning and ask, who are the ones who are going to lead this congregation in this the new millennium? Who will it be who will do the work of this church in the world? Well surprise! We are the ones, we are the ones we've been waiting for. There are no other hands than ours. There are no other minds than ours. There are no other imaginations than ours, to breath the breath of life into those *Seven Principles* we hold so dear. To breathe life into the *Mission Statement*.

Reality has always been a seamless web of interrelated systems. No one else but us can take the next right step for this church. We are a volunteer organization. We are the ones we have been waiting for. To be a volunteer in this church means that you are participating in a definition or redefinition of the meaning of freedom in our society. By joining this organization, you are exercising your individual power with an organization which is totally free.

Your membership, your belonging means that you will participate in the process of making church and social decisions. You are part of making the democratic process in the United States made stronger by your participation in this volunteer organization. Your membership has literally furthered the cause of democracy! Think of the power that voluntary associations have had in our world:

- . the establishment of schools and colleges
- . conservation of natural resources
- . protection of all people's civil rights
- . attacking the poverty issues
- . improvement of race relations
- . interfaith groups seeking ecumenism
- . the suffrage movement for women's vote
- . demand for welfare and the establishment of unions

A UU church is a special place to grow, because each of us, when we become members, commits to actively creating a safe place where growth can be nurtured and fostered. Each of us has and will be changed in a dramatic way because of our involvement in this volunteer organization.

- ~ your inner life now takes shape as you live out your moral dreams within this community
- ~ integrity of you as an individual grows
- ~ relationships to other persons is strengthened
- ~ individual power is strengthened, as is the power of the church in the community where it dwells is felt
- ~ members learn first-hand how the democratic process works.

Freedom of churches and religious freedom go hand in hand with the democratic, liberal principles of one person, one voice, one vote. And a church separate from the state cannot force someone to give financial support to the church, the members affirm responsibility to participate in the shaping of the policies of that church and then funding the dream. All done in freedom, with non-coercion, from a person's sense of duty from their own conscience.

Our democracy, our country, our church will only be as strong as the volunteer associations remain. Totalitarian governments, authoritarian systems, and dictatorships will never allow a strong volunteer strata of society. How do you know you are a part of a strong, healthy voluntary association? The institution can articulate easily its purpose for being, one can see the strong commitment, the energy that is expended, and of course a separation of powers so the

organization is free to do what it formed itself to do.

Through volunteering here, we learn about our world and our culture. We learn skills in listening, discussion and organization. We speak out on issues near and dear to us, but not just with one voice, but in many voices. We learn how to be together, how to live together, how democracy works in a smaller milieu.

Voluntary associations have brought about prison reform, prevention of cruelty to children and animals, often in opposition to the world around them. Margaret Mead reminds us: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

After being here for awhile, it doesn't take long to realize that many people give of their best to keep this church growing and maturing. I remember marveling to hear that people would serve two terms on the Board of Trustees because there was a need. I marveled to hear that people have stayed up late into the night putting together procedures for the church and By-Law changes and long-range plans. I marvel to know people care so deeply for the future of this congregation that they give and give and give. We are all the recipients of that giving and those dreams.

We need the mission to involve all the elements of visionary, healer, warrior and teacher. We need the mission to remind us of who we are. We need the mission to lead us. And yet our fears and our future are somehow tied together. Can we separate them enough so we can let go of our fears enough to let the future in? Only a clear *Mission Statement* will give us that kind of permission to move ahead. You have had Mission Statements in your life before, even if you didn't know it. All it is, is the accumulation of your hopes and dreams put into words and then into action.

I, now invite anyone who would like, to stay after the service and join me in the front of church with your tea or your coffee and specifically begin to talk about your greatest fears and what commitment you see as your work in the church to fulfill our mission. You see, there are some reasons to be concerned. We have not met our budget for this year. We, as a church are spending more money each month than we are taking in. Just look in your newsletter at the financial report and you'll see people have not fully paid on their pledges. All this makes for a feeling of fear. But if we talk about the fears, get them into the light of day I do believe they can be worked with, maybe even overcome. Is there more that you can do to make this secret inheritance, this membership of yours more alive, so that the church can move ahead? What tribal type do you most personally identify with? And how can that gift of yours benefit the church and its future. After the service join me up here, behind the pulpit, and let's share on a deeper level.