

Mission: Wildflower!
September 13, 2009

Yesterday, about sixty members and friends of Wildflower Church gathered at the Shady Hollow Community Center in south, *south* Austin, to work with the congregation's Committee on Ministry and consultant Joe Sullivan on creating a church wide covenant of right relations. (The event might ring a bell if you remember the announcements I've been making about it for the past few weeks. Lucky you: no more of those!) From 9:00 am until 3:00 pm, people worked in groups of six to eight people, sharing stories, listening, taking notes, watching commonalities rise to the top, reporting to the larger group, and discovering once again all the spirit, strength, and beauty that Wildflower Church holds and is. I thank each and every one of you who was able to attend, and I hope to help all of you who couldn't attend to find your own

sense of ownership of this covenant as we continue to work toward completing it. The Committee on Ministry and I will keep you posted on how all of us can be a part of that journey.

Now, aside from appreciating the formal and covenantal work we did in yesterday's workshop, I myself was especially happy to see in attendance some people who have only been coming to Wildflower for a matter of months. Seems either I managed to lay the guilt trip on them in a way that more weathered Wildflowers don't fall for, or these people truly felt a sense of wanting to come, to be a part of this experience, and to perhaps deepen their sense of Wildflower community.

One such person I had the chance to talk to as we stood in line for pizza lunch was Laurel Martin, who, it turns out, happens to be that rare form of creature known as a lifelong Unitarian Universalist. As we moved down the line, Laurel mentioned how timely it is that we are working on this

covenant of right relations now, considering our currently accelerated journey of seeking a home of our own. That's right! I thought. How wonderful that we will be able to "pack up" and bring with us a covenant that will guide us and sustain us as we move toward and into—fingers crossed—a permanent building for Wildflower Church! Thank you, Laurel, for helping me see that gift so clearly.

But, to keep this sermon moving in a seemingly but not ultimately tangential direction, let me mention a couple of things about that building on the horizon. First of all, I want to offer up a glory hallelujah to the members of the building committee, who have been transforming our wish for a home of our own into action, by visiting a multitude of properties and, at this point, recommending to the Board that we sign a letter of intent for a property on Corral Lane, near William Cannon and I-35. (Building Committee members, will you

make yourselves seen so we can thank you?) A letter of intent, so you know, is not a contract to buy the property, and we are not going to land anywhere, let alone this particular place, without everyone's vote and voice. What a letter of intent does is simply inform the seller that we wish to enter into what's called an Earnest Money Contract. And what's an Earnest Money Contract? Well, put simply, it's a contract that says, "Hey, we're interested enough in this place that we want to get an architect in there to do a preliminary inspection, to make sure it's sound and that it can be modified to suit our needs. So don't go selling it to someone else for the next 120 days or so while we do that, OK?"

That's where we are right now with our journey toward a home of our own. And with every step forward, we are going to do the very best we can, with the leadership of the Board, the Building Committee, and the Communications Team, to make

sure you stay informed. I, ask, however, that you meet us half way, by reading the weekly news *before* deleting it; by attending Conversations with the Board when they are announced; by visiting our website on a regular basis; and by reviewing relevant information that will be displayed at a table in the fellowship area in the weeks and months to come.

OK, fine, you say. A building might be on its way. But this, here, now, sounds more like an infomercial than a church service. I have come here to worship. Where is the worship? Where, in Waldemar Argow's words which we heard Tommy read earlier, is the temple, "ancient as the home;" the altar, "ancient as the workbench;" the sacrificial fire, "ancient as the sword"? Where is worship?

My response to such a question is, look around you: "Differing words describe the outward appearances of things;" says Argow, "diverse symbols represent that which stands

beyond and within. Yet,” he continues, “every person’s hunger is the same, and heart communicates with heart.” Worship is here. Worship is within us and among us, in this sanctuary, at this very moment. It is in the children whose presence in our community calls us, in Sara Moores Campbell’s words, to seek within ourselves, “a child’s heart, that we may be filled with wonder and delight;” to seek within ourselves “a child’s faith, that we may be cured of our cynicism....” Worship is in the paper-cut and ink-stained hands (though hopefully not carpal tunneled wrists) of those among us who say to themselves, “I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something,” and so set out to do the work of committees and lay leading and number crunching and report writing and contract signing.

Worship is within and among those of us who, when the spirit says “do,” get up and do, and who, when the spirit says

“sing,” get up and sing! Still, you may say, the reading states that “we are dedicated to one *august* destiny,” that “we share a common quest,” but what *is* that destiny, what *is* that quest, aside from attending workshops and looking at real estate? In Argow’s terms, such a quest might be to remember that “we are children of one great love, united in one eternal family.” In the language of our congregation’s own mission statement, I believe it is to “transform ourselves and the world around us through acts of compassion, love, and social justice.” And that, in part, means joyfully nurturing one another in our lifelong spiritual journeys, and it means being deliberately inclusive and open-minded. Not a trivial quest at all.

Nor is it one that we can afford to take without mutual, and mutually sustaining, effort. Without one another, such a quest, such a mission would indeed be impossible. And, perhaps more importantly than impossible, it would not be

worthwhile. For, who among us wants to be on a journey of compassion, love, and justice, without others there to companion us, and to be companion to? Our lives, our destinies, are intrinsically interrelated. One cannot practice in seclusion our first principle—the inherent worth and dignity of every person—nor can we practice in isolation our seventh principle—respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. And all the five principles that come in between: without the communal practice of these two bookending principles, they would have no place to live, no place to come to fruition.

So it is that only in community, only in the companionship of family, friends, neighbors, and gracious strangers who sit beside us, does our mission become worthwhile. Only then does it become possible.

But speaking of possibility, let me touch for a moment on the music we heard played during the fabulous slideshow that Lois Brown put together. As most of you may know, that music is the theme song to the 1960s television show *Mission: Impossible*, and by now, I hope it's clear, judging from today's sermon title, our earlier bit of theater, and the wonderful, artful givo-meter that Gay Phillips has created for us, that *Mission: Impossible* is the theme that is weaving itself into our consciousness today.

And I want to point out to you, should you wonder why I would want, even implicitly, to juxtapose our own mission with the notion of impossibility, that in the television show, the Impossible Missions Force always, *always* succeeded in their missions! The power of the mission lies not in its facility but in the challenge that is put before the team and in their

determination to persist despite what may seem like overwhelming circumstances.

Again, not a trivial quest. I'm reminded again of the words of our Unitarian prophet, Edward Everett Hale: "I am only one. But still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." That is how an Impossible Mission Force works. Mr. Phelps, played quietly, handsomely by Peter Graves, never refused an assignment, never refused to do the something that he could do. And, since he knew he could not do everything, he always found agents who could round out and fulfill the everything that had to be done, by their not refusing to do the something *they* could do, too.... Get it?

So it must be how a Wildflower Mission Force—that is, us—so it must be how we work as well!

And so it is how we choose to launch this year's stewardship campaign. As I am ubiquitously known to say, we are it. The members of this thriving, loving, creative community you see around you, and within you, are what keep this thriving, loving, creative community alive. We are a collectively self-sustaining community, and so we are called once more, as we are every year, to pledge our financial commitment to Wildflower Church.

Now, if there is a gulp in your gut upon hearing that, it's OK. I know financial times are not easy. I ask no one to give more generously than he or she is able. I myself am giving only as generously as I am able, and I am fortunate to be able to increase my pledge once more. Doing so, I know we will all be one step closer to having an operating budget that will support a staff that includes not only myself, but our Director of Religious Education, Penny Burnette; our childcare workers

who take such good care of our little ones; our pianist and choir director Elke Baitis; our bookkeeper, Jennifer Almond; and our brand new office administrator, Dotti Sizer. By my pledging, and by your pledging as well, I know we will be one step closer to acquiring a paid youth advisor in the near future; to developing a listening ministry within our congregation; to sending delegates to district and general assemblies; to continuing our good work with Austin Interfaith; to paying our rent both here and in our office down the street until we've settled into our own, new home; and to keeping the compassionate, loving, and justice seeking spirit of Wildflower Church alive! That's all I'm asking you to do, too.

Now, practically speaking, the stewardship team, Michael, Linda, and Tom, has gathered up and trained several great Wildflower folks to serve as visiting stewards this year. (Stewards, if you could stand for a moment, so people can see

you, that would be wonderful. Thank you.) If you're a member of the church, or if you've been coming regularly to Wildflower for some time now, you should expect to hear from one of these stewards in the coming weeks. They want to visit with you, listen to your stories, hear your concerns, and answer any questions you might have about making this year's pledge. I hope you will welcome them into your home, or meet them at a café or park, or whatever brings you delight, so they can have a chance to know you.

But don't feel you have to wait, either, for a visit, if you're ready to make your pledge now. The top secret black case is ready to receive your pledge card right now! We'll be running our campaign through October 11th, but the earlier you pledge, the earlier we can celebrate making our goal!

In the meantime, I invite you to spend some time to reflect on what you have received from this beloved

community, and what you wish to give to it. For when you give to this community, whether through money or time or creativity or teaching or singing or what have you, you give to one another, and you strengthen the interdependent web of which we are all a part.

With that in mind, so may it be that, as so many of us did yesterday, we practice living into a covenant of right relations with one another, and with ourselves. So may it be that we seek the spirit of a child, “filled with wonder and delight... cured of our cynicism... not afraid to need... not afraid to love.” Thus we will return to that ancient sacrificial fire, our flaming chalice, and thus shall we remember that we are all “children of one great love, united in our one eternal family.”

Amen. Please rise in body or spirit and join in singing hymn #1028, Fire of Commitment.