

“Good Things Happen”

The cherry blossoms were at their peak in Washington DC last week. As my family tried to make our way around town, amongst the tired tourists, weary waiters, and ragged retailers, I wondered who, among the well-dressed, briefcase carrying, high heeled, suit-wearing humans were the movers and shakers of the city. Which were the power brokers who had real influence in the running of one of the most important shows in our country and which were all dressed up with no where to go. Peering up at the steps of the Lincoln memorial, the Supreme Court, and the capital, one can't help but think of the enormous events of history that has transpired there.

But then, I remembered that history is what you make it. And we've made plenty here and while our accomplishments over the last year may not have affected the entire country, they have been important and even life changing for our little community. When you look back, this congregation has really done a tremendous number of good things in the last year and its time we pat ourselves on the back just like those folks in Washington do! Although here, I believe we deserve *all* of ours!

Good things are not hard to find around MVUUC! What I find most exciting is that a year ago, I stood here describing the challenges we had faced in the previous year. Today, as the kids say, “its all good.” I'd like to tell you about some of the highlights.

Let's start with one of our most precious resources, our children. In our Religious Education program, with the hard work of our Co-DRE's, incredible things have been happening. Last summer, our first Hogwarts Summer Camp launched with 41 young wizards gracing our halls. And take it from me, Charms Teacher, Professor Dharma, the camp was fantastic. It also brought many new families to MVUUC. We expect this year to be just as popular! The adult Hogwarts dinner was a huge hit for the Harry Potter in all of us and the celebration Sunday service drew a record 75 folks!

We also offered Our Whole Lives, a Unitarian Universalist Sexuality Education Program this year, with 10 children in the Kindergarten through First grade program and 6 youth in the 7th-9th-grade program. In addition, regular Sunday RE attendance increased by 40% this year- quite an accomplishment when you consider the limited space in RE!

But our creative DRE was able to accommodate more children while still providing quality experiences, by employing a Montessori-based curriculum. Spirit Play uses “story baskets,” to learn our principles and sources and utilizes a flexible age range in less space. Even if your children are long out of the program, you may want to check out teaching in this exciting new format.

Obviously, growth is a major theme this year. Our Sunday service's attendance has once again increased over the previous year. An interesting note is that attendance remains steady regardless of the program. This tells us two things: we have quality speakers from our own congregation and we are a healthy congregation because this community is

committed to be with one another on Sundays.

Although officially, we have 81 members, we have 51 non-member friends. These are people who have not signed the membership book but that we see on a regular basis. These folks still pledge, participate in activities, and receive ministerial services. They are unable to hold office or vote however. Looking at those numbers, we have reached over the 125 mark in terms of "regulars" here!

Another high point in the last year has been the growth and quality of our choir under the excellent leadership of Caitlin Ballinger, Demetrius Ingram, and Kenneth Tysick.

They have not only provided beautiful music but we have been blessed with the energy and enthusiasm of many BGSU and even high school students that are drawn to them and our welcoming and loving community. In fact, other congregations ask me how we do it! And let's not forget that we have an incredible new piano donated by the Israel family as icing on the cake!

Furthermore, we have had an amazing year in the wider community and received much media exposure. We've been seen as the beacon of liberal thought and action in this region. From gathering at the Wood County Courthouse to perform the first same sex marriages, meeting with Jim Obergefell, to being invited to speak at public events such as the Bowling Green Interfaith Breakfast and the Toledo Area Anti-Trafficking Breakfast, we have been in the spotlight repeatedly. I also continue to represent us as a steering committee member of Not in our Town. Although these things get publicity, we must also be proud of the quiet work we do, like providing financial assistance immediately to those in need of food and shelter without waiting periods and mountains of paperwork. We also conducted a number of short-term projects that were perfect for those who cannot commit to long-term social action. Lastly, we now take a monthly collection for local agencies in need.

Finally, the Electronic sign from the Cauffiel's continues to draw in people when they read our liberal messages and become curious about who we are. All of this is to say that good things are happening here every day.

"Good Things Happen Together"

Author and former UU minister, Robert Fulghum wrote, "Without realizing it, we fill important places in each other's lives. It's that way with the guy at the corner grocery, the mechanic at the local garage, the family doctor, teachers, neighbors, and coworkers. Good people who are always "there," who can be relied upon in small, important ways. People who teach us, bless us, encourage us, support us, uplift us in the dailiness of life. We never tell them. I don't know why, but we don't. And, of course, we fill that role ourselves. There are those who depend in us, watch us, learn from us, take from us. And we never know. You may never have proof of your importance, but you are more important than you think. There are always those who couldn't do without you. The rub is that you don't always know who."

When I read that, I thought, that's MVUUC. We are all more important to one another than we think. We are a network of mutuality. We fill important places in each other's lives. Some of us fill bigger places, some of us smaller, but we are all connected. I am, constantly amazed at how deeply the people here care for one another.

From driving someone home from the hospital, to breaking bread together so someone does not eat alone, to remembering milestones in others' lives; the connections make here are deep and lasting. They are not casually made or broken; it's a bit like paper dolls. (Begin cutting out paper dolls)

If you've ever done it, you know, making paper dolls is a bit tricky. If you cut the wrong way, they won't be linked. Each one has four points that must not be cut so that you have a continuous chain. It occurred to me that we have similar connections in this congregation.

For instance, at our hands, we share the work of keeping our community going by participating in leadership, committees, and pitching in where is needed, even at the spur of the moment, like helping to clean after potluck. On the other hand, we join hands in our community to help those in need. We donate our time, treasure and talent in our community to make our world better and more just.

Paper dolls are usually connected at both feet as well. We walk together in two ways. First, on a liberal path to explore our individuality spirituality. Although we may choose different directions, we support one another on our way. Secondly, we walk the talk together. As members of this congregation, we stand and walk together in solidarity with injustice locally and globally.

We may not always remember that someone is always there to hold our hand or walk with us here, but rest assured, like a chain of paper dolls, there will always be someone at your side when you need them in this congregation. As Robert Fulghum wrote, "It is still true, no matter how old you are-when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together." (Reveal chain of paper dolls)