

Love as our Guiding Vision
Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver
March 16, 2025

Annual Pledge Campaign Reflection – Donna Aase

Good morning. I'm Donna Aase and I'm a member of the Annual pledge campaign team. This morning I'm going to reflect on the campaign theme, provide a few details about the campaign, and finish by introducing the team.

This year Rev. Kathryn has been preaching on the shared values adopted by the UUA. Just last week she held up the handmade JETPIG plushie and quizzed us on what the 6 letters stand for. You can see I'm not going to quiz you, but I am going to bring your attention to two of the values.

The G at the end of JETPIG stands for Generosity, which is the theme for this month's worship and Chalice Circles. It's no coincidence that the theme for the start of the pledge campaign is generosity! The other value that I want to bring your attention to is the one in the middle.

It's love, which has a prominent place in our theme this year, "Love will guide us." It's the title and lyric in a song that we'll be singing later in the service, and it's a reminder that in good times and bad, as we travel the path of our lives, love can guide our actions and decisions.

Before I introduce the hardworking pledge campaign team, I want to give a heads up of what you'll be seeing in the next four weeks, through the end of the campaign on April 13th.

If you are part of any groups or teams at the church, a pledge connector will come visit your group to lead a short discussion and make sure you have what you need to respond to the campaign. If you haven't responded and haven't been part of a pledge connector visit, you'll be contacted by a pledge connector towards the end of the campaign.

In worship the next four Sundays, there will be testimonials from a range of congregants, sharing their thoughts on supporting this congregation.

Each Sunday you'll also get a report of the previous week's responses. We'll let you know the numbers of new pledges, increased pledges, same or lower pledges, and responses with no pledge. Everyone who responds will be represented with a heart that we'll string hopefully all the way around the room.

Finally, I want to introduce the Annual Pledge Campaign team. This group of folks started meeting in September to prepare for this important task. As I introduce each person from top to bottom, you can join in the refrain, "among other things," which I'll cue with a hand.

Julee McTaggart has been our fearless leader, keeping us on task at meetings and organizing a very special celebration after each service this morning, among other things. If you're here in person, I hope you join us in the RE Building after service to enjoy the treats Julee has procured for us.

I'm the public face of the campaign, speaking to you this morning and creating much of the weekly notices and announcements you'll be seeing, among other things.

Rev. Kathryn took a lead in the Pledge Connector training, among other things.

Our Board liaison Christine Deblock is responsible for the fantastic foyer poster to measure responses, among other things.

Joyce Tobias helps with follow up after people have responded, among other things.

Congregational Administrator Natalie Hutchison Duff has done technical magic updating the website and pledge forms and created our colorful logo, among other things.

Gail Sears just joined the team and didn't make it into the picture. Gail will be helping process pledge response forms as they are returned, and next year will add other things to her portfolio.

Many other volunteers are helping, including those serving refreshments after service and the Pledge Connectors who will be visiting groups and teams.

I'm taking the time this morning to highlight the varied and extensive work of this team because of the importance of our work. Budget Director Mellie Hock did the math and found that 92.5% of the church's income comes from your financial pledges and gifts. Now, that's not 100%, but it's darn close. The campaign we present matters. More importantly, your response to it in the coming weeks matters. Your response, your support of UUCV is how we keep the doors open, the lights on, our employees paid fairly, and the worship services and programs running, among other things. We hope love will guide YOU to a generous response.

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Can we find the way? If we ever needed magic, we could use it now.

There are those who just love power and they throw us down a well of deep despair.

So true. It is stunning what that love of power can do and is doing before our very eyes. Fortunately, the choir (and Stephen Schwartz and Alan Menken) remind us of love, too, and how in that love, *there's a power - love power - feel it flowing through you like a rushing stream.*

I felt that love power at work yesterday afternoon. About 30 members of our congregation met with congregational consultant, Rachel Maxwell, to talk about the magic we could use now - the collective vision we have for this congregation and its work in the world, as we confront those who love power and deny the spiritual truth, the greater truth, that the power of Love is what we need to harness and unleash upon the world.

I heard promising conversations yesterday, hopeful visions for the future, invigorating disagreements, and poetry. There's no product at this point, it was just the beginning of a process and a conversation, but an inspiring beginning.

If we ever needed magic, we could use it now.

I am hopeful on days like today, when a dozen people join this congregation to add their strength to ours – people committed to public health, personal growth, national parks, public service, public education, libraries, world peace, authentic living, intersectionality, martial arts, learning and teaching and spiritual growth. I do hope you take a copy of the biographies they've shared with us, or read them online when they're linked in the bulletin this week.

I'm hopeful on days like today, when we gather together, as one group yesterday put it, "supporting our friends while planning insurrection." I think that was the response to one of the questions about a time when you had the most fun in this congregation, and the answer was more specific to the global majority group within the congregation – "supporting BIPOC friends while planning insurrection," but I think it applies to all of us, whether we're supporting our queer friends while planning insurrection, or supporting our children while planning insurrection, you get the idea.

I am hopeful on days like today, when we launch another Annual Pledge Campaign to fund this institution and provide this people with a place to gather with friends to plan the insurrection. Because it is an insurrection that is needed, a revolution of values, an insurgency of principles. Love Power, not the love of power. This traumatized country has it backwards – we are not in need of more territory – Greenland or Canada or Gaza; we need to occupy, to inhabit, the territory of our hearts, that final vision of love which moves and connects all things: *l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle...* "the love that moves the sun and the other stars."

Don't get me wrong. I'm not preaching vague slogans and platitudes about open-mindedness and love: I mean there were 9 circles of hell in Dante's Inferno long before we get to redemption, but perhaps rather than a 13th century poet, 20th century theologian James Luther Adams is more to the point. He wanted the liberal church to do more in the face of the world's evils.

We do need to plan the insurrection. But we need to be smart about it and strategic. We need to care less about appearances and more about effectiveness. We can't do everything, so the some things we do must be chosen wisely and planned carefully – we can't control the outcome, only the process. We can't change the other, only ourselves.

This visioning process which was launched yesterday will help us, I hope, become strategic about our work and focused on what needs to be done, and what must be let go in order to be most effective.

Drafts of vision statements were put to paper yesterday, none of which will be presented to the congregation for adoption – for we need to get more input from you, from more than the 30 who showed up yesterday. This is a process that will last several months. We won't be adopting any language this June.

But just so you get an idea of the conversation yesterday, I'll read these to you. I may not have captured them accurately, but the papers they were written on will be transcribed so any mistakes this morning will not be repeated. But the five rough draft statements went something like this:

1. We are a loving congregation that gathers to heal and connect with ourselves and each other and to collaborate with the community with visible actions in alignment with our values in the world.
2. UUCV: a welcoming community of love in action
3. UUCV embodies a radically transformed community driven by actions grounded in love
4. We envision ourselves as a catalyst for transformation in the world fueled by love, justice, and equity.
5. Become a community of hyper local, hyper vocal yokels.

As you can tell, we didn't have any fun yesterday. Like I said, this was just a quick first start. Next step include the appointment of a very small committee – 3 people likely – to get input from the rest of you and begin to take these drafts and draft other ideas, until we come up with a vision statement that describes the future we seek to create. It's not as much about the words on the page as the work we are doing and will be doing long into the future. It is about focusing that work for effectiveness and alignment. Because it is an insurrection that is needed, a revolution of values, an insurgency of principles. Not the love of power, but the power of love. And don't get me wrong: Love has a power. It is not weak and impotent and does not make the church irrelevant. I think what James Luther Adams was critiquing is our fear of power – our fear of our own power.

We who hold power, rightly don't wish to hold it over others, but have not been taught how to use that power with others – because that power – the power of community, the power of working together – has not been valued in our society which heralds the story of the individual hero. Even when we re-tell stories of successful mass movements for human rights, we tend to reduce them to the individual leaders – Gandhi or King, forgetting the thousands of names of people who used their power to lead alongside and with those who became famous. We wouldn't know about Viola Liuzzo had she not been killed. She's the Unitarian Universalist lay person from Detroit who went to Selma for the voting rights march to Montgomery who was killed by the Klan. Think of all the Unitarian Universalist lay people and clergy who joined that march who weren't killed and didn't become famous but whose power supported the civil rights movement led mostly by Black civil rights leaders. Liuzzo was white, as were many of the UU's who participated in that day and age, including the other ones who became famous for being attacked, Clark Olsen, Orloff Miller and James Reeb who did not survive. But they knew how to follow Black leaders and use the power they had as white people – unearned, undeserved, for sure – but they used that power to fuel the insurrection.

The Civil Rights movement of the last century was a righteous cause as are the human rights movements of our day – the attack on immigrants, people who are trans, the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities and women – these attacks are real and here and must be stopped. We have the moral high ground. There is no moral justification for the violence, abuse and dehumanization of people – it serves to keep the rich at the top and the poor fighting amongst themselves.

We have the harder path, the longer game, the love power: *l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle...* “the love that moves the sun and the other stars.” We are from the stars and we have a longing, a vision.

I ask you to fund that vision, that vision we're working to define, but that you know is guided by love, powered by love. I am hopeful today, and that is no small thing. You are the reason for my hope and I thank you.