

Widening Our Reach, Growing Our Hope
The UU Church of Vancouver
December 7, 2025

Reflection on the Theme by Kelly Kanyid

If you don't know me well, you might not know that my family hosts a Free Fridge and Pantry in Hazel Dell as a part of the Vancouver Free Fridge project. It's a small shed that holds a dry goods pantry and a refrigerator. It's kept stocked full of free food for anyone who needs it by local businesses, volunteers and neighbors. Every Sunday when we are finished with church, my family picks up a large donation from a local grocer.

One recent Sunday we pulled up to our driveway with a car full of ugly produce, dinged cans, and foods with a week until expiration - all donated from a high-end grocer that struggles to sell anything that appears less than perfect. There was a man in our driveway already, apologetic, afraid he was in the way. He explained that he has three kids, but had back surgery this year and lost his job, and they had no food in the house because the grocery bill was bigger than expected for less food. Not that he owed us an explanation. Asking for and accepting help runs counter to the messaging we've received our whole lives about bootstraps, hard work, and individualism; messaging that often ties our value as a person to our productivity, even in a rigged system.

We piled his bags full of food. It made me so proud to be a part of this community, a part of a neighborhood that tolerates this Free Fridge and Pantry we've kept in our driveway for four years now. I'm so proud to live among and in cooperation with the volunteers that perform maintenance and help keep the fridge and pantry clean, the neighbors who buy extras to keep it stocked, the patrons who are saving the world by preventing food waste. I am so grateful for this opportunity to unite with my neighbors, other volunteers, and my community in the pursuit of a more beautiful life. Things are pretty awful all over the world, but I need only look out my front door for evidence of just how great people can be to each other, and that gives me hope.

Homily by Barbara Hilbourn

Hello everyone. I'm Barbara Hilbourn, and identify as she/her. I am a somewhat new member of UUCV and to Vancouver but NOT new to seeing the struggles of people living on the streets, especially in our rainy winters. I had made a promise to myself when I moved here to eventually do some kind of volunteer work using my time and talent in my continuing spiritual practice of helping feed others. And then, while still unpacking, I got a call.....from Tracy... asking for help. We had met and she knew my background in the kitchen of my previous UU church and other food adventures. She introduced me for the first time to Share, a great long time Vancouver organization.

As the on-site coordinator for our volunteers, I've found that working meal service at the Men's Shelter is really rewarding and the easiest volunteer work I've ever done! Show up for your shift. Be directed to assignments with a clear ending time. The extra benefit is to work as a UUCV team together on our Group days.

Their system is great for scheduling even has reminders to your next schedule. While the shelter kitchen is for approximately 50 transitional men, many seniors....they additionally send packaged food for the women's shelter,....but it had to expand to those living on the street or actually anyone in need. An example was during the recent EBT federal funding issue, service increased by about 30 people for the hot Sunday breakfast as well as other meals. Dinner service averages about 125 people, young and old, men and women, with about 12,000 total meals a month.

When handing out food servings, they are tracked....are you "inside" or are you "outside" for funding numbers. Inside are those living at the shelter, outside those in the camps around the large block of the shelter.

The caring staff are exceptional...preparing 3 meals most days, 2 on weekends and holidays using what is available by ordering from the Clark County Food Bank, donations directly from stores and purchasing. Even receiving lots of doughnuts, recently. But they compassionately take their jobs further by help handing out a few socks, clothes and hand warmers to help those individuals they identify. And even a dog coat for someone's new pet from one of their own dogs. These donations show up as small drop offs from volunteers and just the caring community.

When I was at a dinner service in November one young woman showed up in a light sleeveless dress and I even commented to her. "You need a sweater" she replied " it's back at the tent" She appeared to have remembered to come to dinner late. One of the staff noticed and found her tee shirt, saying he wished he had a sweater.

As she was leaving, I noticed a sales tag on her collar. I just felt she thrown on something clean to come to dinner. On the drive home, all I could think of was all the sweaters I had at home and to bring in a few to donate as needed. And grateful to be driving to warm dry home. Being a volunteer kitchen assistant is helping these wonderful staff people prepare and serve the many meals to the needy community around this downtown center. I'm really grateful, I'm able to contribute to SHARE and continue fulfilling our increasingly needed community mission.

Homily by Tracy Riley Kelly

Hello, my name is Tracy Riley Kelly, and my pronouns are she/her. In October 2019, UUCV embarked upon a new way to serve the unhoused in our community – it was called Family Promise. That was when I got involved, heading the food effort. Spearheaded by Rick Krahn,

Family Promise enlarged the services we had been historically providing by our church offering a week of service at Share's Winter Hospitality Shelter – WHO, at St Andrews church in Orchards.

Let me tell you about the late Rick Krahn, resting in richly earned peace – Rick made things happen. He had a huge concern for anyone suffering at the hands of injustice. He didn't just talk about it – he did it. We lost a giant and miss his leadership. Rick brought us to see that as we serve others we are working on ourselves; every act, every word, every gesture of genuine compassion naturally nourishes our own hearts as well.

Friends, people are living in the frigid cold, in despair, out on our cold and rainy streets tonight and every night.

Rick connected us with Family Promise – housing and feeding a few families in our RE Building for one week quarterly through the years. Each session 70 people from UUCV came forward to volunteer for shifts or make meals – or do both. Unfortunately, as time went on, we learned that Family Promise, inexplicably, was unable to locate unhoused people in our area! The Unhoused Team decided to do diligent research and turned to organizations with high direct service models. This led us to the Council for the Homeless, and back to Share. Through surveying our volunteers, we decided to focus on Share's Hot Meal Program and one week back at WHO.

As you heard from Barbara, Hot Meals is going pretty well, and will be even better when some of you can help there. But the need in our community requires way more help than even this valiant effort by UUCV. So, it is time to call out to you. Martin Luther King, Jr said, *"Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?"* We could help more people this winter in new emergency satellite shelters at local Lutheran churches. We could give out more warm clothing. We could fill more Free Fridges. We could serve more hot meals. We could help with January's Point in Time resource day. If we had more help, we know exactly the pathways to sign up for – the Council for the Homeless gently nudges us with their most urgent needs. Our team wishes we could say "yes" to more appeals.

Yet we cannot do this alone with the small group currently managing our unhoused actions. Naturally, over the years we have lost team members and gained new ones. But I need to announce that our vibrant member, the phenomenal Dave Irwin, is moving to Facilities leadership and out of Unhoused. We need energetic people with open hearts - like Uncle Sam I declare - We Need You!

Mahatma Gandhi said, *"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."* – Can you join our team?