



# Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

"Nurture, Inspire, Act - Build!"

Delivered 25 February 2024

Rev. Jen Raffensperger

"I want to be [famous](#) to shuffling men  
who smile while crossing streets,  
sticky children in grocery lines,  
famous as the one who smiled back.

I want to be famous in the way a pulley is famous,  
or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular,  
but because it never forgot what it could do."

What do you want to be famous for? In what way? In this particular instance I am asking the collective you - the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York, those gathered here today and those joining us online, as well as those who may later watch the video recording, or listen to the podcast audio recording, or read the transcript.

How many of you knew that in addition to the weekly video recording that we make thanks to our hardworking tech volunteers, we also have Jason editing that video, as well as ensuring that the service and sermon are available in other formats?

How many of you know that when Gretchen steps away from the keyboard to lead the choir, the music that continues to play is not something pre-packaged, but is in fact pre-recorded by her for use here on Sunday?

How many of you know that Elizabeth and I touch base on the Time For All Ages, but that she conceives and designs what she shares with you, ensuring that UU values are represented, different kinds of learning are considered, and that we try to engage everyone in the room?

There is all kinds of hidden labor that makes UUCYork what it is - and I have barely touched on the many gifts from our volunteers!

What makes all of this possible, literally, is generosity. Of your time and talent, and also of your money.

Last year this congregation held a collaborative workshop and out of that work arose our new Mission and Vision statements, that were then voted on and affirmed by the congregation. I'd like to share them with you again right now - we share the Mission statement at the start of every service.

“The mission of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York is to nurture a loving community, inspire lifelong spiritual and personal growth, and act for a better world.

“The Vision of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York: We are a thriving congregation of all ages, embracing each other, and partnering with those in our community who work toward justice, fairness, and equity.”

If you weren't able to be a part of this workshop, I'm so sorry - because it was really an amazing time together. Asking people what they love most about this community, these buildings, these grounds - the stories that we shared touched everyone's hearts, stirred memories, and conjured up dreams of what is to come.

Much like our little shared LEGO project here, thinking about what we want to build together out of what we already have is an exercise in dreaming... but we can consider other verbs too!

That's what our consultant who led our workshop wanted us to think about as we considered a statement - that consultant paid a fair wage for his time thanks to the budget provided by your generosity! - he wanted us to think about the verbs, the action words that took us from merely considering the community we wanted to making that a reality.

In our mission statement we have three strong verbs: "Nurture, Inspire, Act." And if we consider our vision statement we also hear words of strength: "Thriving, embracing, partnering, and working."

To nurture, we want this place to feel safe for all who seek shelter here. We know that UUCYork is where you find a place to pause and to gather yourself for the week ahead...a place where you meet people who share your values...a place where you can feel connected to something larger than yourself. That happens in this sanctuary, and it happens in the Carriage House, and it happens on Zoom, and it happens on our stunningly beautiful grounds. All those places and spaces take time and money to maintain.

To inspire, we want to support healthy ministry, healthy staff relationships, and vibrant volunteer connections. Worship is our key time of shared inspiration and without the staff AND volunteer contributions, worship simply wouldn't happen. There is a magical, nearly alchemical thing that happens when I think about a theme, and Gretchen picks music, and the choir or a song leader or two bring that music to life, and the Worship Associate gives voice to a reading, and Robert makes these visuals, and Doug coordinates the tech team for Zoom, and Elizabeth creates a Time for All Ages, and Jason makes sure that all these gifts are accessible again and again even after the fact. What happens can transform both those who gather for worship and those who co-create it.

To act means we are rested enough, safe enough, inspired enough, empowered enough to articulate our dreams - to move them out of our thoughts and hearts and into our hands, into our work together in the world.

None of this happens without time, without talent, without treasure. It simply doesn't.

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Today I want us to remind each other of what we can do. That's what stewardship is about - reminding ourselves about the ways we have built this place and community we love, and about the ways we can continue to invest in the future we want to see. We're pausing here in the middle of our stewardship campaign, rather than having a big pep rally at the start or a giant guilt-inducing push at the end. This truly is a pause.

I want the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York never to forget what it can do. What it has done and what it can do in the future.

We are in a time of transition. Not just ministerial transition - and we will pause to grieve and to celebrate that together in a few months - but in a time of transition in the world, in the community, in the larger faith community. This summer Unitarian Universalists from across the nation will gather and vote on the proposed Article II amendment - updating our bylaws as part of a regular process but also considering deeply the language that is at the heart of our faith. This fall, the United States will hold another vote, of course... as will our states and counties and communities. It's a big year for change.

We pause together and consider what generosity has brought us, and what it brings us. When we give to sustain a shared and beloved, imperfect and loving, project - like a faith community! - we are dealing in radical hope. We do not know what change will come. There are anticipated changes and there are the ones that shock and surprise us.

What are we famous for? What do we want to be famous for? What must we remind ourselves never to forget what we can do, together? We are stronger together. Our resources will do more, together. Your gifts of time and talent and treasure - that's money, y'all - mean ensuring this place continues to be a place of nurture, a place of inspiration, and a place of action. Not just for all of those already here but for all those who will join us in the future. Take a pause. Take a breath. Consider your gifts and what you want to invest in this beautiful place that you have created and that you have the power not just to sustain, but to grow.

Never forget what you can do!