

Creating Something of Beauty: Shared Ministry
Palomar UU Fellowship ~ The Reverend Beth A. Johnson
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Last Tuesday night I sat with a group of folks in my office to have a conversation about the history of this Fellowship. Mimi Kintz was our able guide, sharing with us the history of this Beloved, Becoming Community that sustains and nurtures us and to which we come with our joys and sorrows, and give of our time and gifts.

Mimi spoke about the beginnings of the Fellowship – an answered newspaper ad, meeting in homes first, then in tents on the grounds as the building was being built, tents decorated with geraniums that the bunnies who have grown up and remained with us found to be delicious food. Lay-led for half of its history, the founders and the folks have cared for each other with remarkable devotion and tenacity. In the unfolding of the story, I am struck by the resiliency of the fellowship – as we learned, this fellowship survived and thrived in and through both difficult and joyful times – through deaths and disagreements, crankiness and leaving takings, births and transitions.

I find in this story the creation of something of beauty.

Hegel wrote: “Beauty is merely the spiritual making itself known sensuously.” In this community, then, I see Beauty as values revealed in concrete acts.

“Ministry is an act of Love creating a thing of beauty,” according to pastoral theologian, Gordon Jackson.

Ministry, then, is not something that just *I* do as the clergy person in this community. Shared ministry is what we all do as individuals with and for one another – in our families, in this congregation, in the wider world – it is the notion that all people are called to share their gifts with one another.

And what I hear embodied in this history is the beauty of shared ministry. Perhaps it not necessarily been thought of as such, but when I came to you all I found example after example of the shared ministry of this congregation – so much it is difficult to name it all for it pervades the life of this fellowship...

The amazing caring committee mobilizes it's committee members and others in the fellowship to see to it that all members and friends who are in need are reached out to and their needs met – whether it is rides to the doctor, or soups, or a listening ear.

The Craft Guild offers its creations to benefit the fellowship and its members share their love providing food and set up for memorial services...

Greeters, ushers, choir, Deanna and Steven, the sound folks, those who make the coffee, fold the newsletter, plan the auction...all contribute to the ministry of this fellowship...

This is creating beauty. For beauty is found not in perfection, but in the tenderness of souls striving to love. Beauty is found in the harmonizing of varied and sometimes even discordant gifts into a symmetry that creates a lovely, healing pattern...

Beauty is revealed in the gestures of compassion and acceptance that are shown toward the other – the understanding that a companion's flaws are not fatal, that the community is greater than the sum of its parts, that all of good will are welcome to share their gifts and this ministry.

As we journey together on this grand adventure toward building a compassionate, liberal religious community, we bring to bear all of ourselves...our talents and our wounds, our confidence and our growing edges, we bring our best selves and we bring the selves that sometimes falls short.

Shared ministry is the living of our values within a community that both needs us and sustains us. And part of what I think makes it ministry rather than a collection of people doing tasks is that it is in the service of our vision and mission and we reflect on it as such. The reflection is not the piece we do all the time, but such reflection is rewarding and helps to guide our work.

In sharing the ministry we gather in partnership, co-creating out of our diversity and uniqueness a community of depth and width that reflects and resonates with the beauty of love, that enhances not only our lives, but the lives of others as well.

“From you I receive, to you I give; together we share and from this we live.” We live and grow and deepen in our sense of ourselves, and in our importance to the whole of life by giving and receiving to and from each other.

Content not to limit the compassion and creativity productive of the beauty that we enjoy, we say in our mission statement that the work of social justice is valued equally with the warmth of friendships. Hence, we work to create a world where the beauty residing right beside tragedy can be experienced – sharing our gifts.

Ministry happens when we are discontent with what is – it is an urging on to imagine what might be - it is a lure to create greater possibilities for hope to catch us, for love to be made manifest, for life to flourish.

The beauty of shared ministry comes from the balancing of our individual aims and diverse claims into a vision of greater possibilities for love and service in this community and the wider world...for it is ultimately the love that we share with others that redeems them and ourselves.

We yearn to be of use...and in this community we do that in so many ways.

This homily was followed by a responsive reading #567 “To Be Of Use,” by Marge Piercy, which was followed then by a homily by Eileen Maurer, chair of the Committee on Ministry. Her homily recounted PUUF’s community outreach program, Shelter Helpers, and introduced the Heifer Project and alternative gift giving for the holidays.