

AUGUST 2025

the **VOICE**

Creativity



PEOPLES CHURCH
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

TABLE of CONTENTS

- What sparks creativity in ordinary moments?
- What does *The Congregation is the Curriculum* mean?
- What story are we telling with our stewardship theme, *Still We Rise*?
- What does creative governance look like at Peoples Church?
- What does it mean to creatively steward our resources?
- How can our UU church creatively influence policy and community?
- How is creativity part of our work listening to the congregation?

MINISTER MUSINGS



What sparks creativity in ordinary moments?

by Rev. Carin Bringelson

One summer when my niece was 8-ish years old, she came to visit our family in Madison for a few days. One of the activities we did together was press wildflowers.

This involved picking flowers (like Queen Anne's Lace) on our walks; placing the blossoms between layers of paper towels, newspapers, and heavy books; then letting them sit for several days until they were dry. We used the dried flowers to create greeting cards that we then mailed to her grandmother.

The process of creating such greeting cards all started with *noticing*. Noticing the flowers in our environment. Noticing which ones were white and lacy, which ones were lavender with numerous petals, which ones were bright yellow poofs. *Noticing* was foundational to our creative process.

No matter what we humans are creating, *noticing* is an important first step:

- ✓ Creating a feast? Notice the spices in the dish, the arrangement of the food on the plate.
- ✓ Creating a poem? Notice the sounds of words, the way they roll off the tongue.
- ✓ Creating a dance? Notice the stretching of the muscles, the feel of the air on one's limbs.

The same is true for other spiritual practices – *noticing* is an important first step:

- ✓ Creating a home altar? Notice the meanings of the sacred objects you place with reverence.
- ✓ Creating a hymn sing? Notice the lyrics of a favorite song, the harmonies that soar.
- ✓ Creating a chalice lighting? Notice the Shared UU Values, placing Love at the center.

As the Jewish Studio Project puts it: "We are all *created* creative." In other words, we all have creative inclinations. It might just take some *noticing* to get our creative juices flowing.

Last month I went to visit my niece who is 28-ish now. She's still noticing the beauty of flowers. This time she created a living bouquet from her backyard flower gardens. She gave the colorful bouquet to her grandmother.

This month, may you notice the beauty and love that surrounds, sustains, and creates with you.

Growing in Faith,

Rev. Carin

FAITH FORMATION



What does it mean, ‘The Congregation is the Curriculum’?

by Interim Director of Faith Formation, Bridget Laflin

“Faith development is all we do. Unitarian Universalism is the faith we teach. The congregation is the curriculum.” - Connie Goodbread

“You know it’s up to us to make it all up. So whatcha making up? I could make it up that you could be loved no matter what.” - Jason Mraz

As we celebrate creativity this summer, I wonder about the relationships between the children/youth and the rest of the congregation. The young people are not separate from the adults in this congregation. They ARE the congregation in a very real sense. And they are learning from you.

Every time you interact (or choose not to interact) with our children and youth, they are learning something about Unitarian Universalism. As Connie Goodbread so wisely said, “The congregation is the curriculum.”

- ✓ So what curriculum are you teaching?
- ✓ What are the young people of this congregation learning from you?
- ✓ Are they learning that this faith truly embraces everyone and sees the inherent worth and dignity of all, no matter their age or neurodiverse behavior?
- ✓ Or are they simply being “put up with” until they grow into adults?

And what are you learning from these UU Youth? They are not only our future. They are our present. They are the people who are growing up in the UU faith and don’t have to deal with baggage caused by a harmful religious upbringing, like so many of us. They understand Unitarian Universalism in their bones, and we can learn so much from them.

Developing these mutually beneficial relationships will require creativity and courage from ALL of us, not just the DFF and Faith Formation teachers. We are ALL the creators of this church. We ALL build the future of this faith community together. We are ALL the present AND the future of this experiment we call Unitarian Universalism.

We can create a true community where people of all ages have friendships and know and respect one another. We can make up a church community where stories are shared among generations, where elders and children have deep friendships.

And so I ask: “How are you participating in the creation of this community? How are you using your creativity to nurture relationships and make sure that each and every person in this congregation knows that they are “loved no matter what”?

I encourage you to reflect on these questions and on how you would like to live into your creativity to strengthen our beloved community. I can’t wait to see what we create together.

STILL WE RISE



What story are we telling with this year's stewardship campaign?

This year, our stewardship campaign tells a story rooted in simplicity, but rich in purpose. Three small words—Still We Rise—carry the weight of a community's resilience, a congregation's conviction, and a shared calling to show up with courage, generosity, and gladness. Inspired by Maya Angelou's iconic poem, the theme invites us into a narrative that is both timeless and timely.

Still speaks volumes. It whispers of endurance in the face of disconnection, disagreement, and division. It reminds us that even in weary moments, even when hope feels distant, we rise anyway. But it also calls us to rise from a place of stillness—grounded and unshaken. In the silence between the noise, we find the clarity of our Unitarian Universalist values. Justice. Interdependence. Equity. Pluralism. From this stillness, our resolve deepens.

We proclaims belonging. It tells each of us: You are not alone. It tells all of us: We are stronger together. In an era that often shouts "every person for themselves," we choose a different chorus. One that sings of community and collective action. We echo the challenge posed by John Lewis: "If not us, then who? If not now, then when?" We are not passive. We are powerful.

Rise is the heartbeat of this campaign. To rise is to move—not only upward, but forward. It calls us to lift up those pushed to the margins. It demands that we meet this moment—this congregation, this city, this planet—with courage and care. It encourages us to rise above fear, above fatigue, above the smallness of petty divisions. And like the sun that faithfully crests the horizon, we rise again and again, a light for one another and for the world.

Together, these words tell a story of stubborn gladness—a phrase that reminds us joy can be resistance, and hope can be a choice. This year's stewardship campaign is not just about sustaining our church—it's about becoming the kind of community that rises not just in spite of hardship, but because of it.

Still We Rise.

This is the story we're telling—together!

BOARD PRESIDENT



What does creative governance look like at Peoples Church?

by Robyn Miessler-Kubaneck

What if governance isn't just about structure, but also about creativity—the ability to imagine new ways of being together, making decisions, and living our values? When we ask *What's possible now?* instead of *What have we done before?*, we open the door to curiosity, collaboration, and transformation. Governance becomes a way to share responsibility in ways that reflect our values and support our mission. Creative governance invites us to ask:

- ✓ What if social justice is faith formation—because learning and action are both spiritual practices?
- ✓ What if faith formation is membership—because belonging grows through shared growth?
- ✓ What if everything we do is worship—because every act of care and connection is sacred?

By aligning ministries around shared purpose, creative governance fosters more collaborative, sustainable service. It honors capacity, invites meaningful participation, and turns governance into a living expression of our values.

What new possibilities for creative governance are waiting in your corner of the community?

Recently we launched our stewardship campaign, Still We Rise. But what if we broaden the definition of stewardship to include experimentation?

Trying new ways of gathering, budgeting, or using space can be a faithful act—even when it feels risky. Creative stewardship means listening to our community's changing needs and responding with courage, care, and flexibility. It's about more than numbers—it's about stretching our imagination to ensure our resources reflect the church we're becoming. It invites us to ask:

- ✓ What if our building is ministry—because hospitality builds beloved community?
- ✓ What if our budget is a moral document—because spending shows what we value?
- ✓ What if time and energy are sacred—because service is love in action?

Shared leadership models, like co-chairing, can bring more voices to the table and make service more sustainable. And when every meeting, task, and ask connects clearly to our mission, we feel energized and valued.

To steward creatively is to co-create a church that's alive, responsive, and rooted in love.

Where might you begin?

SOCIAL JUSTICE



How can our UU church *creatively* influence policy and community?

We're not legislators. But we are voters, storytellers, moral voices, and community builders—and that's where our strength lies.

At Peoples Church, we've long understood that social justice isn't just about laws—it's about lives.

Through our Second Sunday Plate Collection this quarter, we are directly supporting Iowa Environmental Council's work advocating for clean and healthy drinking water across the state.

And that's not abstract, it's personal. Because water flows through our bodies, our homes, and ecosystems.

But giving money isn't the only way we participate. Our recent presence at Cedar Rapids' Juneteenth and Pride celebrations show how we can *creatively* make a difference.

With our Ribbon Art installation, we invited the community to answer "What does freedom mean to you?" And as each tied a response to the frame, a collective testimony of hope and struggle emerged.

So *what's next?* For one, we don't need to wait for an invitation to speak up. Each of us can—

- ✓ Write op-eds
- ✓ Submit public comments
- ✓ Testify at city council meetings
- ✓ Organize letter-writing campaigns
- ✓ Volunteer at a phone bank
- ✓ Partner with groups already advancing social justice causes and help amplify their stories

Already, Peoples Church is hard at work. Together, let's sustain that momentum!

SACRED LISTENING



How is creativity part of our work listening to one another?

by Laura McGraw, Chair of Sacred Listening

What would it look like if Peoples people really listened to each other? What kind of culture could we create? Our Sacred Listening Initiative is well under way.

(If you haven't yet been contacted by a listener, you can expect that you will be soon.)

So HOW are we listening and WHAT are we listening for?

Conversation is a creative act. Many decisions are made along the way about what to ask and what to tell. Some of us (ahem, looking at myself) are enthusiastic sharers and are very willing to tell our stories and to insert our own thoughts into conversations.

While the instinct to share is not inherently bad or wrong, it can have an impact on the other person feeling truly heard.

Most of us are interested in the lives, thoughts, and passions of others, but don't always feel comfortable asking those courageous and curious questions.

Imagine a church culture where the questions we ask each other go beyond the usual polite banter. Now imagine how this type of connectedness might impact our other friendships, work relationships, even family dynamics.

Let's challenge ourselves to find creative ways to deepen our connections to each other and to those in our communities.

Tips for Deep Listening

- ✓ Listen more than talk
- ✓ Ask open-ended, curious, and courageous questions, including follow-up questions
- ✓ Repeat or paraphrase what is said for validation
- ✓ Be mindful of non-verbal cues like body-language and tone
- ✓ No JABs! (Judgement, Advice, Blaming)



AUGUST

- 3 Worship at 11:00 a.m.
- 4 Building and Grounds Team at 2:00 p.m.
- 9 Faith Formation Volunteer Training at 1:00 p.m.
- 10 Worship at 11:00 a.m.
- 12 Archives Team at 10:00 a.m.
Faith Formation Council at 6:30 p.m.
- 13 Shared Ministry Team at 10:00 a.m.
- 16 Worship Arts — Retreat at 2:00 p.m.
- 17 Worship at 11:00 a.m.
CUUPS at 12:20 p.m.
- 19 Finance Team at 7:00 p.m.
- 20 Social Justice Team at 1:00 p.m.
- 21 Stewardship Team at 2:30 p.m.
- 24 Worship at 11:00 a.m.
Faith Formation Pool Party at 1:00 p.m.
- 27 Sacred Listening Team at 7:00 p.m.
- 28 PCUU Board Meeting at 6:30 p.m.
- 31 Worship at 11:00 a.m.

PEOPLES CHURCH

MISSION STATEMENT

“Leading compassionate lives through spiritual growth and just action.”

BOARD of TRUSTEES

President

Robyn Miessler-Kubaneck

Bob Butikofer
Emily Hoselton
Linda Levy
Josh Wagner
Lu Wilcox

Ex Officio

Rev. Carin Bringelson
Gary McGraw, Treasurer



OUR STAFF

Minister

Rev. Carin Bringelson (she/hers)
minister@peoplesuu.org

Congregational Administrator

David Kind (he/his)
office@peoplesuu.org

Office Hours

Tuesday through Thursday
10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Interim Director of Faith Formation

Bridget Laflin, M.Div. (she/hers)
faithformation@peoplesuu.org

Office Hours

Tuesday & Thursday
9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
(and by appointment)

Social Media / IT Outreach Technician

Matthew Wilde

Worship Accompanist

Judy Mitschelen

Choir Accompanist

Andrew Stoneking

CIRCLE of LIFE

As we shared in January, Bev Philpott died on December 1, 2024 after a sudden pulmonary embolism. An active member of Peoples Church for over 40 years, Bev and her husband Ian moved to the Twin Cities in 2022 to be closer to their children and grandchildren.

Bev's Celebration of Life will be held Sunday, September 21, 2025 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Wanatee Park Red Cedar Lodge — 1700 Big Bluestem Dr. in Marion, Iowa.

