



Transforming Times



Forgiveness

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In my younger days, I once worked for a small business. The owners set out a vision and a plan for eradicating mistakes. A “mistake jar” was visibly placed in the office. For every mistake made, a dollar was to be placed in the jar.

I don’t know if the plan actually reduced the number of mistakes or not. There wasn’t an assessment process to determine the effectiveness of the plan. I do know that one result of the plan was the creation of a culture of secrecy, suspicion, finger-pointing, and blame. When a mistake was discovered – anything from a scheduling mix-up to a billing error – a tremendous amount of time and effort went into figuring out who made the mistake so they could be forced to pay up.

No one was willing to admit wrongdoing. Punishing mistakes became more important than fixing them. Let’s just say – it wasn’t a happy (or productive) place to be.

We all make mistakes. We all fail. We all hurt each other. We all hurt ourselves. The religions of the world all address the human need for forgiveness, recognizing imperfection as the nature of human existence.

Learning to forgive is a life skill. Not an act of will, but a willingness to engage a process, forgiveness can be a spiritual path to wholeness for those willing to do some hard work.

Forgiveness is something we do for ourselves; the hardest work we will ever do. Forgiving people (including ourselves) who have hurt us is a personal process undertaken to relieve emotional burdens of anger and resentment, shame and guilt.

There are two sentences – a total of five words – that hold the power to transform a community’s culture from one of fear and distrust to a culture of courage, honesty, and abiding trust.

I’m sorry.

I forgive you.

It takes courage to say “I’m sorry,” because it implies an admission of guilt. It comes with a risk of punishment.

It takes courage to say “I forgive you,” because it implies an admission of pain and hurt. It comes with a risk of vulnerability.

Hard work indeed, this human transaction of forgiveness: to forgive mistakes, small and large, our own and those of others, is to flex a certain spiritual muscle. As Ghandi noted, “The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”

The strength of the community we make is found in the fiber of forgiveness. There is no avoiding the reality of imperfection, the inevitability of mistakes. Our choice is to bear the burdens of hurt, anger, and bitterness or to accept the gift of liberation that comes with living in the grace of forgiveness.

Yours, Diane

Transforming Times is organized around theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church’s offerings are by no means limited to the themes. They do provide common ground for community conversation, a way to gain more meaning and depth. We want to hear many perspectives on each theme. You are invited to submit your original poetry, artwork, or short essays of 400 words or less. Be warned: seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

- September: Freedom
- October: Covenant
- November: Religious Authority
- December: Concepts of God
- January: Evil
- February: Love
- March: Brokenness
- April: Forgiveness
- May: Transformation

Report on Lisa's Sabbatical Goals

As many of you are aware, I was away on sabbatical and study leave for five months from mid-September through mid-February. Four of those months were the sabbatical that I earned through my service to the congregation as Lifespan Faith Development Director. I am very grateful to the congregation for including sabbatical in my letter of agreement; this sabbatical was an incredible opportunity and experience. Thank you.

I used my sabbatical to continue my training for ministry. I went to Arcadia, CA where I worked as a full-time chaplain intern at Methodist Hospital for 12 weeks. They have a certified training program there for ministers of all faiths called Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). CPE is the intensive course in practical pastoral care and is valuable for anyone who plans to become a minister.

In my group of interns there were 5 Christians, all affiliated with Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, and me. Of the 5, 2 are Presbyterian, 2 from Asian Christian churches, and one Anglican. Our supervisor, Teleso Satele, is also Christian, a minister in the American Samoan tradition. Two thirds of our time was spent visiting patients and one third was spent in group receiving training and processing our experiences since we were learning by doing. Each of us chose a learning theme. Mine was "focus on feelings." Throughout my work there, I focused on identifying, naming and listening to others feelings and my own.

Before I left the Sabbatical Team and I developed goals for me and for the congregation to focus on during the sabbatical.

My goals were to:

Develop skills in pastoral care:

By listening for and naming feelings in my visits with patients, I learned a whole new way to minister to people.

Work with people of different faiths:

I worked with patients and chaplain interns of other faiths and realized that by connecting at the human feeling level, theology was less of a barrier between us

Practice understanding ecumenical perspectives, offering Christian prayers and designing interfaith-friendly worship services:

I got to have insightful conversations with my chaplain intern colleagues and learn about their perceptions of God. I struggled with the concept of prayer and had an enlightening experience planning the interfaith Thanksgiving service.

*For the complete article, see our website uuctucson.org.
Check the bottom of the homepage for links.*

Assessment of the Congregation's Attainment of Its Sabbatical Goals

As stated during Lisa McDaniel-Hutching's send-off in August, her sabbatical was intended to be a time for both Lisa and the congregation to learn and grow, so the Sabbatical Committee helped establish goals for both Lisa and the congregation to achieve during her time away. Upon Lisa's return, the Sabbatical Committee* met with the Lifespan Faith Development (LFD) Teams* to reflect on the extent to which we feel we achieved those goals and what we learned in the process. While there are many who felt Lisa's absence, this assessment comes mainly from the LFD Teams' perspective.

An over-arching theme is the fact that we refer to ourselves as LFD Teams – plural. We learned that we all performed our assigned tasks well in Lisa's absence, but the very fact that she was absent, that our group did not have its "head", meant that we were more likely to worry about the "how" we were getting the job done instead of keeping foremost the "why" we are doing the job in the first place.

Goal # 1: Gain an appreciation and understanding of the complex workload of the LFD Director.

We feel that we have met this goal! We now know that Lisa's job involves coordinating with all levels of the church staff/volunteers while keeping in mind the purpose of our work. We learned as we went along the many levels at which Lisa maintained balance both within LFD and amongst other church entities. For example, she not only maintains coordination within the LFD event schedule (eg, seeing to it that the Speakers/Social Justice/Share the Plate activities all happen in a timely way so the congregation can make the connection each month), she knows the proper procedures to coordinate with other staff and committees to make sure there are no conflicts and that the events happen smoothly. And in doing all this, she also evaluates all possible programs to determine whether they fit into our Vision and Mission.

Goal # 2: Develop new perspectives on the ministry of the LFD Program.

Lisa's absence did not lead us to envision a very different Program. Quite the opposite, her absence allowed us to see just how crucial we feel it is to maintain (1) a shared Vision and Mission for the Religious Education (RE) and Adult Faith Development (AFD) Programs and (2) a LFD Director (LFDD) to lead both groups. My response to the next goal elaborates on our reasons for this.

Goal # 3: Evaluate the organizational structure and staffing of LFD Program, keeping in mind our needs for the future.

Having to function without our LFDD reinforced our belief that the RE and AFD programs should be united within a Lifespan Program with one person in charge of keeping the group focused on the Mission and Vision of the program and the church. This person is also valuable for all of the advanced planning necessary to maintain a vibrant program. And based on the number of hours staff actually worked (as opposed to their budgeted hours), we feel that in order to properly maintain the program, a LFDD should have two staff members, one to run the RE Program and one for the AFD Program.

Goal # 4: Evaluate our current methods and experiment with new, possibly more effective ways of doing things.

For the most part, we felt that current methods were sufficient to address whatever issues arose. However, we did realize a few things we'd like to change, and many of them involve increasing either the numbers or training of volunteers: (1) The current training of new RE Council (REC) members should be beefed up to ensure that each member knows how to carry out all tasks that fall under his/her portfolio. (2) No REC member should hold more than one portfolio. (3) The Curriculum portfolio holder should maintain a standing committee to properly address both current and future needs efficiently. That standing committee should consist of at least one person experienced in teaching RE. (4) The AFD team should recruit more members (it currently consists of one part-time AFD Assistant and one volunteer). Because more volunteers are necessary and it is often difficult to recruit outside of RE families, LFD will maintain a list showing the groups/committees on which each RE family member is currently serving to show that RE has representation throughout the church and thus encourage those from all areas of the church community to volunteer for RE.

Communication was another place where it was felt improvements could be made to better coordinate efforts. For example, the AFD Team and Worship Committee could better coordinate their weekly offerings if they communicated regularly. In the same light, it would be good for RE and the Worship Committee to have regular contact when the children are involved in the service.

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Regarding sabbatical procedures, it was agreed that both the brochure and the digital photo frame were useful tools during Lisa's absence. It is recommended that these are used again during future staff sabbaticals. It was also clear that having two staff members in place to keep things moving was necessary. Many, many people stepped up to volunteer when needed, but without staff know-how, the volunteers would not have had the direction necessary to get the job done.

Goal # 5: Take ownership of the LFD Program.

As I stated at the beginning, this assessment comes mostly from within the LFD program. To fully explore the extent to which the **congregation** took ownership of the LFD Program, we will need more input. And because our assessment is ongoing, we welcome input from any in the congregation who feel they have something to contribute.

Goal # 6: Empower the REC and AFD Team to provide LFD programming.

Mike, as AFD Asst, Kathleen, as RE Coordinator, and Heather Reed, as REC Chair, all felt empowered to take ownership of their portion of the LFD Program – both as leaders and delegators. They felt supported in this by the minister, other staff, congregation, REC, RE families, and teachers. For example, Mike found himself suddenly in the position of determining which new class ideas were and were not appropriate for UUCT. We think his decision to start the drumming class is just one example of how well he rose to the task. Likewise, Kathleen needed to think fast when the numbers in the 1st thru 5th grades did not grow to warrant two classes, as expected. The curriculums available were not appropriate for the large age span, so Kathleen worked quickly to put together a Curriculum Committee, identify a curriculum designed for such a large age span, and evaluate its appropriateness for our goals in the RE Program. If you ask the teachers and children in that class, you'll find that Kathleen did a fine job. And the support from others encountered along the way was crucial to their success.

Goal # 7: Express our love and appreciation for the LFD Director through our support during her absence.

We feel we did a good job of filling our own and Lisa's shoes in her absence and in that way showed her our love and appreciation. Reports from congregants have been very positive and support this belief. We thought another way of extending our show of support for Lisa is by advocating for what is important to our program, including the resources to maintain an engaging and inspiring array of classes and the appropriate staff-hours to properly run it.

Submitted by

Heather T. Reed, Sabbatical Team member and Chair, REC

In full consultation with the Sabbatical Committee and LFD Teams

**A full listing of the Sabbatical Committee and LFD Teams' members can be found on the website.*

History and Mission of No More Deaths

No More Deaths is an organization whose mission is to end death and suffering on the U.S./Mexico border through civil initiative: the conviction that people of conscience must work openly and in community to uphold fundamental human rights. Our work embraces the Faith-Based Principles for Immigration Reform and focuses on the following themes:

- Direct aid that extends the right to provide humanitarian assistance
- Witnessing and responding
- Consciousness raising
- Global movement building
- Encouraging humane immigration policy.

A morally intolerable situation inspired a remarkable humanitarian movement in Southern Arizona in the spring of 2004. Driven by economic inequality, thwarted by ill-conceived US border policy, and ignorant of the harsh conditions of the Sonoran Desert, more than 2000 men, women, and children have died trying to cross the Mexican border into the United States since 1998. At the beginning of 2010, conservative estimates put the total number of deaths at about 5,600. Most of the deaths have occurred in the brutal heat of the summer months.

With another summer of inevitable deaths looming, diverse faith-based and social activist groups—along with concerned individuals—felt compelled to act to stem the death tide and attempt to save at least some lives. The result was the creation of No More Deaths/No Más Muertes. This interfaith organization includes Christian, Jewish and Catholic churches and organizations, but is open to all those who share its mission and faith-based principles and follow its protocols. The UUCT, one of the founding faith groups in 2004, adopted No More Deaths as a social justice ministry in July, 2008.