

## **Our Little Light, Our Radiant Vision**

© Dr. Chris Schriener 2019

Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, May 5, 2019

Good morning! It's wonderful to be here at the quarter-century mark, after knowing this congregation for almost 20 years. I love Mission Peak for its own sake, and also as part of a larger Unitarian Universalist vision, a revolutionary new way to live lives of healing and transformation. UUs create their own philosophies of life, without being told what to believe. We learn from all religions and philosophies and from science and the arts. And we are united by our shared *values* instead of a revealed religious doctrine. Do you realize what a radical breakthrough this is?

Today I want to mention a few highlights from Mission Peak's history, from just before I became minister in 2000 till I retired in 2008. And looking back, I think our sense of vision has helped us face some very big challenges.

In the 1990s Mission Peak had a dynamic minister named Ben Meyers, and when Ben resigned there was a crisis of confidence. Membership dropped to around 80, and people wondered whether they should just call it quits. But they "kept on keepin'on," with excellent help from an interim minister, Howard Dana.

When I became your minister in 2000, I was told that the congregation's leaders were exhausted, but what I saw was an astonishing outpouring of energy that just never stopped. There is no shortage of energy when we're excited about our goals. I was very impressed by your worship associates program, and the Pastoral Associates program initiated by Rev. Barbara, and the small group ministry that Doug Rodgers got rolling. And we had a strong focus on membership growth, which was not easy. Every year in the tri-cities area there were fewer of those in the demographic groups that have typically been attracted to UUism. And many newcomers to our area did not have the cultural tradition of Sunday morning church attendance. We looked for ways to connect with these newcomers, and we're still trying to figure that out. But we managed to gain members anyway.

At the time I arrived, Mission Peak was not much involved in social issues. But we responded to the 9/11 attacks by deepening our involvement in interfaith work. We are now seen as an ally by many progressive Muslims, and tonight some of us will attend the Holocaust Memorial Service at Temple Beth Torah.

In 2001 the Board set up a Welcoming Congregation Task Force so we could be officially designated as welcoming people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, and we completed that process June 9, 2002.

On our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in May of 2004, my sermon stated that "Recently we have hit a few bumps in the road. ... The economy is still bad, and our annual canvass may fall short this year even though most of us have increased our pledges generously. And [our landlord] plans to double our rent." Those were big challenges! But we kept going, and we kept growing. And then

we lost our lease! We set up a wonderful task force to search for a new home but we found almost zilch till someone in the Methodist Church told us about this building. And what a blessing this has been!

And it was a blessing for me to be with you. In dealing with these and other challenges I grew as a person and as a professional, and I will always be grateful for this opportunity.

There are definitely complications in being a congregation but in some ways being a UU is absolutely simple – not easy, but simple. When we come to Mission Peak, we just need to bring our values with us! We can use every experience here to focus on what is precious, to stay on a path that inspires us and empowers us. You want a spiritual practice? Then practice seeing everything we do here in the radiant light of our highest aspirations, consecrating this community as *sacred time and sacred space*. That's how to blow this little flame to greater brilliance, by placing it in the larger light of our free faith. May it be so. Amen.