



# Planning Ahead

**Rev. Dr. Susan Suchocki Brown**

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In a few minutes, we are going to break for a short fellowship time and then come back here for our Bi-Annual meeting. The title that you see in the order of service for today is Planning Ahead and this has become our tradition for the October Bi-Annual meeting. In days gone by we held only one Annual meeting, it was in May. When talking with the Parish Committee a number of years ago, it became clear that the Annual meeting in May was just a report of what, where, who and how things had been done and not an opportunity to plan ahead. Holding a meeting in October to plan ahead and a meeting in May to report on those plans seemed a beneficial way to use our time, talent and resources. This year with my upcoming retirement it is even more crucial that we plan ahead. So today a part of our meeting will be given to this topic and on Wednesday during Soup with Susan a more focused conversation will happen around transition time. If there is a desire for an evening gathering to do this, we have planned October 26<sup>th</sup> and November 10<sup>th</sup> for this. The Committee on Ministry will gather at 5:30 please come and talk with us then. I will be with the group this Thursday until about 6:15 when I will leave to go up to my neighborhood where neighbors will be meeting to see how and if we want to begin a neighborhood association. All around me seems to be the concept of planning ahead. Personally, I like the idea of a neighborhood association, I don't really know what it means beyond the fact that we get to know our neighbor, that we exchange phone numbers and email addresses and meet in person so that when something occurs in the neighborhood we can be in relationship to support, discuss, decide maintain right relations and determine a course of action.

I must say that in this highly divisive political climate that I am feeling an increased sense of anxiety toward the future. And most importantly that one of the fall-outs of this election process has been a splintering of community, shattering of relationships, shaming tactics to diminish worth of all persons and a significant increase in breaking apart the wholeness of community. Anything I can be a part of to foster community is what I am committed to right now.

I am not naïve enough to think that there are not differences of opinions, experiences, approaches to how a community can be, however events such as the Bi-Annual meeting and the formation of the Neighborhood Association offer the opportunity to discuss those differences with respect and dignity.

Marjory Zoet Bankson is the author of *The Soul work of Clay: A hands on approach to Spiritual and Creative Aging*. [ Zoet Bankson] She offers a 7 step process to making clay into a pot.

When I first read an article about this it occurred to me that this is a good image and metaphor for understanding and grasping any situation that requires planning ahead, of transforming, and of building something new. There is no doubt that the United States is in a time of transition and of building something new. My neighborhood is exploring the same possibility. And, most importantly we here at the church have the same opportunity now and into the future.

Before I go into her 7 steps, let me just invite you look back to our vision statement for a moment. There are always four things that stand out for me. One is the word; we- we the members are in relationship to one another, second; dedicate ourselves to journey together- we make a commitment to travel a path- three; support for each other and four: going out into the world with justice, equality and love as guiding principles. No matter how we might be feeling, thinking, wondering or worrying about the future, if you, the congregation and leadership ground yourself in those concepts First Church Unitarian Universalist of Leominster will survive and thrive.

Now let's use the author's 7 R's to discover how to take something as moldable, vague, and unclear as clay or an idea, or a challenging time to learn how make something strong and beautiful.

1. Resist- we and that which we are trying to create initially offers resistance. Change is hard, being formed is tough. Expect resistance.
2. But we will get to the second r. reclaim. We must grasp, understand, act from concepts that are core to the issue. For me these are a. relationship,

b. commitment, c. inner work and then d. outward action. Understanding these can lead us to then reclaim our purpose and plan and this leads to the third R.

3. Revelation- AHA! we say, as we come together and journey together and explore and stay in right relationship, no matter how hard that is- BE POLITE and play nice together- Even if we are testy and encountering difficulty we must stay healthily engaged, sometimes this means putting aside our egos and personal or self-serving needs in order to build anew. This is to risk
4. Risk is our fourth step to creating and planning. Risk to think, feel, hear, see, experience, another's ideas or to explore other options. I don't know that the Neighborhood association will work, and I don't know that it won't. You don't know who you will decide to bring in after my retirement this is all part of risk- and the most important aspect is that you are committed to one another, to journey together, to support and even to challenge one another because you can all relate to the issue.
5. This 6<sup>th</sup> r is relate. Relate to the experience we are all going to have as I retire, a mixture of sadness, loss, grief, anger, support, strength and the sustaining element of being together and wanting the best for the larger good.
6. The 6<sup>th</sup> is release. Release is not forgetting, or not addressing issues; release is doing the best we can. I think of working with clay as is her example of soul work, we as creator hold the image in our mind, heart and hand of what we would like, then we try to influence it, we push a little here, we prod a bit there, we seek to bring form to an unknown, then we must release our influence and be sure that what came forward was the best with the materials we had at the time.

Since 1743, First Church has re-written and reformed its vision/covenant statement a number of times, [5 I think]. This is as it should be- we bring together our best thinking, our talents, our skills, we work with the materials at hand, we try our very, very hardest to create something of significance but as any potter will tell you sometimes the clay pot, gets tossed out and begun over and over till a new thing emerges. But you are always working with the same element- here it is togetherness, commitment, support and a desire to bring Unitarian Universalism out into the world. That is our essence it will never change.

We are at that place. It is time to plan ahead. Hopefully the 6 R's will be a touchstone but never forget that it is the mission and vision core concepts that are the foundation for planning ahead. Blessed Be