LEADERSHIP NOTES: Past President

As I write this, we are all trying to absorb what it means to “Shelter in Place” or to “Social Distance” ourselves from one another. For me, The Alliance has always been about community. It is the place many parts of our larger First Church community come together to break bread, create and strengthen friendships, learn and grow, and give back to our congregation and the larger Portland area community of which we are a part.

How do we maintain our Alliance community during this challenging time – at a distance? This year, after many years of discussion, we created The Alliance Online Directory. Filled with contact information for all of our members, and most importantly pictures, it can become your guidebook to connecting in a time of coronavirus. If you haven’t downloaded this wonderful resource to your phone, I encourage you to contact either Nancy Panitch or Maryann Roulier for an over-the-phone tutorial. Then find a friend, acquaintance, or someone new you would like to meet and make a call or send an email.

During the nominating process this year, committee members reached out to a wide group of Alliance members by phone and in person. We introduced ourselves, shared stories about how we came to join The Alliance, our lives, and our interests. Frequently we learned we had acquaintances, interests and lived experiences in common. I am looking forward to checking in with those I met to see how they are doing.

I have been an active member of The Alliance for over sixteen years, serving on the Leadership Team for at least seven of them. During this time we have welcomed many new members to our community and sadly lost some pillars of our organization. This year I had the honor of hosting our first Past President’s Luncheon. A wonderful time was had by all and the stories were delightful. Each new Leadership Team brings its’ own vision of the organization and how we can best fulfill our mission, serve our members and the larger First Church community. I look forward to watching from the “audience.”

Now – find your Alliance Directory (https://alliance.ctrn.co) and phone a friend. Let’s keep our community strong.

It has been an honor to serve. Please stay safe and healthy.

Yours in fellowship,
Veronica Williams

PASTORAL MESSAGE: Rev. Katherine Jesch

Extraordinary times call for us to find new ways of holding our communities together. For those of us who have been around a while, it’s easy to keep doing things the same way we’ve “always” done them. But with “social distancing” being the order of the day, much of our church life has migrated to online platforms. Leaders all over the Unitarian Universalist world are putting to good use skills we have developed over the last couple of years: Zoom meetings, google docs, and the like.

Ministers are keeping in touch and supporting one another with encouragement, prayers, and poems, technical assistance, and skill sharing. Lay leaders are using these tools as well, moving forward the work of justice, supported by on-line spiritual practices we’ve honed in small groups over the years.

In the last couple of weeks, I’m (re)discovering that the most important thing in this time of social distancing is that we stay connected with our communities. It doesn’t matter how we do it – a zoom meeting, an old-fashioned phone call, or a walk on a trail (at least six feet apart). We must keep sharing our stories, deeply listen to each other, and feel that we’ve been heard.
It’s important to be more intentional about reaching out. I encourage everyone to set aside those voices that say, “I don’t want to bother them;” or “They don’t need to hear from me.” This is just an oblique way of thinking, “I’m not that important,” but we know in our hearts this is not true. This is a good time to talk casually, without an agenda. Refresh those friendships or start a new one. We’re all hungry for connection.

Most of us have time now to talk, and we need to know someone cares about us. Go ahead. Pick up that phone!

**GRATITUDE: Sally Shorr**

In agreement with Unitarian principles, I joined First Unitarian Church in 1984. As I worked with committees – membership, bookstore, nominating – I grew in understanding of the ways in which our principles guided every-day activities.

I joined the Alliance in 2016. When Liz Scully plied me with lunch soon after, she invited me to take on deeper service. She asked me to interview two new or continuing Alliance members and write their profiles for our monthly newsletter, *The Fellowship*, in order to connect our large and growing membership with each other as we engage in service to the church.

I am profoundly grateful for that opportunity. For three years it has been my privilege to listen to more than 40 personal and distinctive stories – in living rooms and coffee shops and cafes. Such inspiring stories they are!

I’ve been trusted to write and treat each one respectfully and accurately. I’ve been honored to share your stories: of courage to take down gender and economic barriers, of determination to pursue career dreams while raising families, of compassion to work for just causes. Our Alliance community members continue to be capable, strong and joyful!

Now I am retiring from writing profiles - to begin writing some stories of my own. Like you, I’ll be sheltering-in-place. I’ll join my neighbor Kathleen Vinson for walks...often! Like you, I’ll find time for daily tasks, books, calls and emails, and practices that sustain my spirit in this difficult time. I’ll join you virtually on Sundays for our streaming church service.

I hold you – and your stories – in my heart, and I wish prayerfully for a time very soon when we will be together again. Be safe, practice love. Elbow bump!

*In faith,*
Sally Shorr

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**Extras for times of Social Distancing**

Have you listened to the entire playlist of your youth? Tired of Netflix or other streaming offerings? Longing for something else? We offer a few suggestions:

The Metropolitan Opera will stream past productions through April 5. Hopefully, they will extend that time period. Operas are available for 24 hours online, which allows for our time difference; additional behind the scenes videos are lots of fun. [https://www.metopera.org/user-information/nightly-met-opera-streams/](https://www.metopera.org/user-information/nightly-met-opera-streams/)

Portland Literary Arts has archived lots of their author talks--catch the ones you missed! [https://literary-arts.org/archive/](https://literary-arts.org/archive/)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. If you are on Facebook, they have contemporary Gallery Talk every day, and in their archives they have years of scholarly talks. [https://www.nga.gov/audio-video.html](https://www.nga.gov/audio-video.html)

Will you miss your garden tours? Here are some quick but lovely tours of international gardens. [https://www.housebeautiful.com/uk/garden/g31913008/best-virtual-tours-garden/](https://www.housebeautiful.com/uk/garden/g31913008/best-virtual-tours-garden/)

What resources have YOU found online? Send them to Katherine Jesch and we’ll feature them in our May newsletter: kathjesch@earthlink.net.

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Find us online: www.tinyurl.com/firstu-alliance