

When the canvass team and I got together to do the initial planning for this year's all church canvass for our annual stewardship campaign we kicked around a lot of ideas of themes for the campaign. I even googled bad stewardship themes just to see what we might like to avoid. There are some really, really bad ones out there. Suffice it to say that we passed on "Pony up."

We did after some conversation think of this theme "Let us Shine" Which I have really come to love. We have a light. We UUs generally believe that each of us has our own light - our own sense of the divine, or sense of our own purpose. We each have a sense of what we can do in this world. And we, as a gathered community, have a sense of the light of this congregation. We are getting known in the larger community as being a place of welcome, as being a place where we are trying to do the work to make this world a better place.

It is no secret that I want this congregation to grow. And when I say that I don't mean only in numbers. Numbers are fairly easy to measure but I don't want this congregation to grow in members only, even though that is great, I don't want this congregation to grow only in budget even though that is great too. I want the light of this congregation to grow. I want us to be a beacon of liberality and welcome in the city of Syracuse. I want our light to show up at PTO meetings, at voting booths, at rallies, at dialogue circles, at community gatherings.

And this congregation has committed to growth. You all voted to support a full time intern next year. You voted to increase our staff in order to increase our capacity. And I am happy to say that we have an intern for next year. Marty Pelham will be our intern for next year. You will learn more about Marty in the coming weeks and months. He is a Florida native who had a career as a Reading and Language Arts teacher. He left that career to pursue ministry and will graduate from Andover-newton theological seminary this Spring. He brings a wealth of experience, and an excitement to be working with us on expanding our impact here in Syracuse.

I want us to be doing two things - welcoming folks who need a community, who want to be engaged, creating a spiritual home for folks. And I want us to be encouraging each of us, as we are able, to also be going out into the world and sharing this love and light of UUism. For some of us that may mean politics and social justice, for some of us that may mean being the kindest person you can be, and it may mean anything in between. I don't

think that there is a right way and a wrong way to let our light shine. Just don't cover your light up, let it shine.

I meet people everyday who are feeling disconnected, overwhelmed, unloved, without a sense of direction. I meet people everyday who have a sense of the sacred, of what is bigger than they are but they have been really wounded by organized religion. I meet people everyday who are looking for community and connection.

We have something to offer these folks. And they have something to offer us. We can offer folks a place to belong, a safe place to belong, a place where they can explore what it means to believe in themselves in others, what it means to have faith restored. And as we welcome folks into our congregation we are strengthened by that. Our vision is enlarged . We learn new ways to be us.

We talked about this in our canvass planning and we decided on using this little light o mine as a theme song. You all know I am not the most musical of people. I often have a lot to learn. I simply thought - hey that is a really singable song that everyone like to sing it would be great. But then I started researching it.

"This Little Light of Mine" is a gospel song that came to be an anthem of the civil rights movement in the 1950's and 60's. Its history is a little unclear. It does not appear to have been a song sung on plantations during slavery. Although that is a little unclear. It was first published by Harry Dixon Loes around 1920 as a children's song." (<http://operationrespect.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/This-Little-Light-of-Mine.pdf>)

Then "This Little Light of Mine" made it into the American folk music tradition when it was found and documented by John Lomax in 1939.

At Goree State Farm in Huntsville, Texas, Lomax recorded Doris McMurray singing the spiritual. The recording can still be found in the Library of Congress archives.

Though Dixon was a white man from the North, the song is often attributed (even in hymnals) as an "African-American spiritual." This is

understandable because it sounds similar to other Southern spirituals of the time." <https://www.thoughtco.com/this-little-light-of-mine-1322521>

Tracing the history of music can be difficult. Perhaps This little light o mine was a folk, one generation teaching another long before the concept of copyright existed. We do know that during the Civil Rights Movement, Zilphia Horton adapted the song and taught it to Pete Seeger. The song is famously tied to Civil Rights leader, Fannie Lou Hamer. While being detained by police on her way back from attempting to register to vote with other members of her community, she began singing this song. (<http://operationrespect.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/This-Little-Light-of-Mine.pdf>)

"This little light O mine" It is a humble song. It's origins are a little fuzzy. It doesn't put on a lot of airs but it is powerful. It is what it is and there is an authenticity in that. It lends itself to one small voice singing it or a whole choir. You can sing it in summer camp around the camp fire - or you can sing it

on the way to the voting booth

on the way to the jail

on the way to the march

you could probably sing it as a lullaby

what sounds like simply a children's song has depth

I think that we this congregation are a little like the song. We don't really put on airs. There is an authenticity to our work. We are not perfect and that is fine because our heart is in this work, our heart is in the way we are a community together, our heart is in our welcome. Let's be that little light, in fact lets be a bigger light. Let's be the light that lights up other