



## Safe Space to Brave Space

**Clover Earl, Board Chair**

“The point of a pilgrimage is to improve yourself by enduring and overcoming difficulties. In other words, if the journey you have chosen is indeed a pilgrimage, a soulful journey, it will be rigorous.” — Phil Cousineau, author of *The Art of Pilgrimage*

On Sunday, October 10, Interim Minister Kathy Hurt, at the start of her sermon, “Going to Extremes,” invited us to consider times when we may have gone too far; been too extreme such that an action taken left us vulnerable to judgment, if not overt criticism. She ended with a challenge that we reflect on times when, as an individual, we might have felt tentative and even held back, despite feeling moved to take a stand about something that feels “holy” urgent.

I remember the first time I heard the words “brave space” spoken from the pulpit. Our then Intern Arif Mamdani used the phrase in a sermon, and I thought maybe I had misheard him. After the service I tracked him down in Parish Hall to express my concern that one of the things I most treasured about my engagement here at Unity might be at risk, that is my “safe space.” I am unable to recall the words he used to try and comfort me, but I do remember that I was not sold on this idea of brave space as something I could embrace.

Now here we are, already a quarter of the way through our interim year and much is being asked of us as we make our way through this momentous period in the life of the church. The Ministerial Search Team has surveyed us, listened to us, offered us the Beyond Categorical Thinking workshop, all of which supports the work of calling the right settled minister for our church. We are being asked to prepare ourselves to let go of things we hold dear; to make way for the unknown. There is an expectation that the congregation engage in the challenging and often uncomfortable work of self-examination about what it means to live an antiracist life.

It has taken time and a commitment for me to understand that in a world as broken as ours, that my comfort — my preference to feel “safe” — is deeply embedded in my white privilege. My friend Jane (a white woman) came to visit from her home in Oakland, CA, a few years ago, and she shared a story when I picked her up at the airport. She had been waiting at the curb when a police car with its lights flashing and sirens blaring came careening around the corner. Jane was standing next to a Black woman who looked utterly terrified, her eyes darted around, perhaps looking for a place to find safety. In that moment, Jane recognized her own white privilege.

This is just one of many experiences I have had over the last few years that have propelled me to step fully into courageous action (one of Unity’s values); to truly embrace what it means to say “yes” to showing up for those who have been oppressed by white dominant culture for far too long.

This month’s theme is pilgrimage. A decades long friend of mine named Danette (another white woman) and I had been in conversation for quite a while about the need we felt to *do something* about systemic racism. George Floyd’s murder was what it took to propel us forward and commit to an unexpected action: “Hey, White People, We Have Work To Do!” a pilgrimage planned for May 28, 2022, from the Minnesota State Capitol to George Floyd Square, was born. We know that there are exciting possibilities as well as potential pitfalls that await us as two white women entering the public realm to discuss issues of race.

What is being born during this time of moving from safe to brave space here at Unity Church is something vitally important for all of us to reflect upon.

And... Mark your calendar for the Annual Meeting of the Congregation on Saturday, November 20, at 10:00 a.m. Details to follow.

## News from the MST

**Jake Rueter, on behalf of the**

**Ministerial Search Team:** Avi Viswanathan, Betsy Hearn, Mary Baremore, Pauline Eichten, Morgan France-Ramirez, Dan Huelster, Lia Rivamonte, and Marg Walker

Friends, I’m writing this with a deep sense of gratitude. Over the last couple of months the Ministerial Search Team (MST) have asked you to dig deep, to spend probably more time than you wanted to with SurveyMonkey, and to join with fellow members of our congregation in listening sessions and focus groups to share your hopes and anxieties for our shared future. You have met this call with enthusiasm and in doing so are helping us to live into the sixth point of the MST’s covenant:

*We will safeguard the sacred trust of our congregation by informing as transparently as possible, listening with an open heart, and engaging broadly.*

We have listened to each other with open hearts and we certainly hope that the opportunities to complete the survey or participate in a listening session or focus group have felt attainable. Each of our conversations, whether virtual or in person, have renewed the energy we will need as the search process continues into its next phases.

We have tried our best to engage this community broadly, and we are now shifting into the third component in this line of our covenant — to inform as transparently as possible. As a team we are working diligently, and with care, to unpack what you have graciously shared with us. The results of the survey, listening sessions, and focus groups will be the focus of an upcoming retreat for the MST in November. At this retreat we will look for common themes and guidance from the congregation for the search as it continues. A summary of this work will be shared at the annual congregational meeting on November 20 and made available online at that time. We hope to see you then!