

# Be the Light: Make Love Real

**Sermon by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan**

*March 2, 2025*

Well, my friends, the time has come...

The time has come for what...

The annual campaign, you say?

Sure.

But that's the means to the end.

The time has come to Be the Light.

The time has come to Make Love Real.

The time has come to keep this sanctuary and our community a safe harbor for anyone and everyone who walks through its door.

The time has come to stand up to hatred, oppression, and abuses of power, while also taking care of ourselves and each other.

The time has come to make love, not war.

The time has come to tell the truth, firmly and clearly, without spreading toxicity, spouting anger, or dehumanizing anyone.

The time has come to care for the Earth and all her creatures.

The time has come to be peacekeepers and justice makers.

The time has come to create, to dance, to laugh, and to be there for one another with deep listening and a loving presence.

The time has come to Make Love Real.

Oh, yes, and the time *has* come for the annual campaign that makes all this possible—this beautiful space, our staff and ministries, and our work in justice.

Our goal this year is \$590,000. This is a 2.6% increase from last year and the lowest increase over the last seven years.

We were able to keep the increased goal so low because of the investments we have made in staffing and the Parish Hall, which allows us to rent our space at affordable rates and to increase fundraising and friend raising in the community.

If we achieve this annual campaign goal, Nick Place, our Director of Church Music, will move

from half-time to full time and expand his repertoire into events, including planning more great music, offering a space for other musicians, and bringing in more concerts, lectures, and community events. In July, we will hire a half-time Facilities Director, who will have the expertise and knowledge to ensure our building projects, both new and ongoing, are done well, on budget, and according to our principles. This will also alleviate some of the extreme burdens being carried by volunteers. And we will be able to continue to have Rev. Laurel, our three-quarter time Assistant Minister of Congregational Life!

Paying our staff equitably, plus covering all the costs associated with running a church this size and caring for our historic building, can be accomplished if we meet this financial goal. And above all, we will continue to love and care for this community and invest in justice work with our partners.

We are looking for 300 pledges, 26 more than last year (and in keeping with our 300th anniversary). Members, nonmembers, friends, and supporters pledge. The average pledge is \$2,100; however, we receive and appreciate pledges of all sizes!

A pledge made today indicates your promise of a donation for next church year – July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026. You can fulfill your pledge in whichever way is best for you, including making payments monthly, weekly, or all at once. Your donations can be set up on your credit cards, or via your bank account. Diane Carroll can talk with you and answer all your questions.

This year, in addition to your pledge, we are also asking you to let us know how you want to get involved. All of us need to do our parts, large and small. But wait—stay with me—this is not your normal “get involved” spiel.

We think we do well promoting our programs and interest groups, social and otherwise. We also are pretty good about asking for help on various committees and boards. However, we know that not everyone can get involved at that level. So, we have developed a card that lists 20 examples

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of things we need help with, many of which are periodic tasks or things you can do from home.

You have an insert in your Order of Service. Please complete the questionnaire and give it to Diane on your way out this morning or to one of our team members during the ice cream social. There is room for you to add things not on the list and to let us know of your special skills and interests.

Back to the reason we are holding this annual campaign and asking for your help.

Churches and other religious places have been sanctuaries in the United States for at least two hundred years. "In the 1800s, U.S. churches gave safe harbor to enslaved people; during the Vietnam War, they sheltered people resisting the military draft."<sup>1</sup> The Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s was an ecumenical movement to provide sanctuary to Central American Refugees.

More recently has been the collaboration between churches, including ours, to provide sanctuary to five Afghan families. All thirty people were classified as human parolees when they came to live with us, a protected status that no longer exists in our country for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans.

Housing refugees, protecting immigrants at risk of deportation, and those whose lives are in danger—all of these examples of Making Love Real are at risk.

A government can take away our privileged status as a place of sanctuary, but no one can take away our love. No one can take away our love.

And those are just some examples of Making Love Real. There are many things happening right now that violate our principles including the abandonment of democratic principles and the inherent worth and dignity of all people, protection of the interconnected web of existence, and working to end oppression. These and more violate all of the principles of Unitarian

1 Bill Chappell, "Churches have a long history of being safe havens—for immigrants and others," NPR, January 26, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/26/nx-s1-5273652/church-safe-haven-history-immigrants>

Universalism which include the use of reason, free and responsible search for truth and meaning, and support of one another in and beyond these walls.

To make love real, we must *work* to Make Love Real. And how we work takes as many variations as there are people. Bringing homemade soup for a tired friend is making love real. Picking up the phone to call someone who is hurting is making love real. Protesting, writing letters, and offering the special gifts of listening, singing, and poetry—which only you can offer—are all ways of making love real.

We are called to be the light and make love real, including love of self and the world, every day of our lives. The time for collective liberation is now. This is not about you and me. This is about the collective WE.

The time is now.

Let us be the light. Let us Make Love Real.

For love is the doctrine of this church and service is its prayer.

Amen.