

“Let’s Get Cookin” a Canvass Sermon
Rev. Brian J. Kiely Unitarian Church of Edmonton
March 20, 2011

Kitchen Blessing, Lance Beswick, Lay Chaplain

This is our new kitchen. May it always be a place of warmth and yummy smells and cooking sounds...a place of friendship where meals are made to share and welcome. A place of comfort and caring where hunger is lost to the pleasant fullness of a hot meal.

May it ever be such a place for our church and our community...and may others who visit this building in search of joy and celebration and companionship find all they seek...and the pleasures of good food.

So let us bless this kitchen. Let the food prepared here and the meals shared be joyous and loving. Bless the cleaning up and the putting away, that they are also times of happiness and community closeness.

And in the spirit of our community let us give thanks and bless all those whose dedication and hard work made this wonderful new facility a reality.

Sermon

Like the most definitely not-yet-unwrapped spring flowers, good things do come to those who wait. One day soon – ish there will be floral colour in this city again. We just need to hang on, show a bit more patience, enjoy the nice days and pretend the other ones don’t matter.

The same can be said about our brand new kitchen, a labour of love, patience, hard work, patience, generosity of self and money, patience, a few bad words here and there...and patience.

But today – at last - we have a wonderful new kitchen. Together and with the leadership of a few special and hard working people, we have done an amazing thing, have given ourselves a wonderful gift. But that gift is not only for us. If we put all that time and effort and generosity into something that is just for the members and friends of this community, well that’s okay, but it’s not great. It’s a little like coming here, finding the gifts of our free religion and deciding we really shouldn’t tell anyone else about it. They might not like it...or maybe they will like it and want to change it in ways we don’t like... or maybe they won’t like us for promoting any kind of religion and we don’t want to be seen as pushy. You know how it goes.

Part of what went into building this kitchen was taking on responsibility for it. Katherine Ball and the kitchen committee designed it and decorated it. Andrew Mills took on responsibility for getting the project done. Susan Ruttan, the Board and some good fundraisers took on responsibility for getting the bills paid. Docia Lysne made sure there was a crew to paint it, and the Esthetics folks made sure of the colours. Everyone involved took on some responsibility for getting it done and done well.

And now they have handed a responsibility to all of us. It is our job to make sure the kitchen gets used well. It is time to get cooking. It is time to think outside the box. We have talked about this in the last few weeks, especially as we have taken on the commitment to fight homelessness. There are already lots of good ideas, like starting a community kitchen, or offering cooking classes including one especially designed for

our Food Bank clients. But there is room for more ideas.

This kitchen, in fact this entire facility, is a great resource for us, and a wonderful home. But we can't stop there. This place can be and perhaps is a great means of outreach to people who might become Unitarians, and also to many more who never will. It is a great tool for social justice and for being a responsible part of Queen Mary neighbourhood and the City of Edmonton. It is our responsibility to use it well. So let's get cooking.

Last week I taught the second half of our NEW U orientation class for newcomers. During that session I pointed out something not everyone knows or takes seriously. The people who choose to become members of this church OWN this church. Each of us holds a share in this building, in this sanctuary, in our new kitchen. In fact, even the remaining mortgage type debt we owe is to our own members who invested personal funds to complete the initial renovations. Look around. We own this. You own this, just like you own this church's community.

Today is the one day of the year we talk about our ownership in an intentional way. It is Canvass Sunday. Although we launched the Let's Get Cooking campaign a couple of weeks ago, today is the day we discuss it. We ask members and friends alike to complete a pledge. What's a pledge? Very simply. It is a confidential document that tells our church leadership how much money you, in good faith, plan to give to the church in the next financial year. That is to say, between this coming July 1 and June 30 of 2012.

Why do we ask each other to indicate this pledge? Planning. Our Board and Finance Committees are hard at work trying to create a responsible and reasonable budget. To do that, they have to have some indication of what our revenues will be. They could guess, but as owners, I think you would agree that guessing about income isn't really a good way to build a budget. I am sure that none of you would do your home budgets guessing that maybe next year your boss might give you a surprise raise. Neither should our Board.

Your pledge is personal. The details are known to a couple of people...and I am not one of them.

However, your pledge is NOT a contract. While the congregation may send out the very occasional reminder about the state of your pledge, no one will do anything other than say 'thank you' for whatever you can contribute. There are no bills. Things change in people's lives and we all understand that. But overall, the Board has found that they can make a pretty good and accurate budget estimate based on pledges. So please pledge. Pledging is a responsibility that goes with owner-membership.

How much to pledge is another sticky question. Believe me, I get it. People get tense when the topic is money, especially their money...especially GIVING AWAY their money. So let's all take a breath.

You know yesterday – well for much of last week – I had a lot of fun making the Irish stew for last night's Shindig. About 160 portions, about 45 litres. I've been thinking a lot about stew this week.

A good Irish stew combines meat, carrots, onions, broth, Guinness (in some), salt, pepper, thyme, bay leaves, Worcestershire sauce, flour, oil and garlic. However, not all ingredients are added in equal measure. If our stew had included 25 kilos of salt along with the 25 kilos of meat, it wouldn't have been edible.

Different ingredients can only be added in different and appropriate measures.

Canvass is a lot like that. Some of us have the wherewithal to contribute the meat. We love this community, but we don't love it more than anyone else, we just have more available money to contribute. Others can afford carrots, some only have the pinch of pepper to give, and some of us can only offer a hand to stir the pot.

But every cook knows this critical fact: It's all needed if those ingredients are going to become a wonderful and savoury meal. And we are all needed to make this beloved church community a warm and savoury place.

Now sometimes newcomers really don't have much of an idea of how the church is financed...they don't really know what the Canvass is asking them to give. It's one thing to know what you CAN give, but it's another to know a realistic amount to give.

Next year's budget will come in somewhere between \$315,000 and \$335,000. The final number will depend a lot on our generosity, on how much we stir into the pot.

Roughly a third of that will come from rental revenue. Another \$15,000 or so will come from other sources like the garage sale and cash contributions. If we raise the same \$200,000 in donations as we have done for the last couple of years, we will break even on the bare bones budget of \$315,000.

That will cover the cost of lots of mac and cheese, a goodly share of healthy vegetables and fruit and, of course, coffee and tea and juice. But it is bare bones. Not so many fancy meals, not a lot of room for new tastes. We will pay for the groceries as we always do, but, to switch images, not a lot left for creating new opportunities, or financing the launch of the kinds of programs that will for example, make our kitchen the community resource we think it should be..

So how does that all break down for individuals? Our Canvass Chair Andrew Mills (speaking of taking his responsibilities seriously, he's also our Kitchen Project Manager and sings in the choir), Andrew has written a great piece on the Canvass I wish to use in conclusion.

Each year I take a close look at the pledges to try and see any pledging patterns that are obvious. The first thing I notice is that it takes a lot of people to contribute to this church. How many people is the first question. I count the people that pledge in two ways. First there are the individuals that pledge on behalf of themselves. Second, there are families that pledge as a family. Third, there are families where each person contributes individually. If you add up all these items then last year we had 210 member individuals or families that could pledge. Let me call these pledging families.

From that group of 210 pledging families we received pledges from 155 in the year 2010. This means that 26% of our member families did not contribute an identified contribution. This is actually better than last year when our percentage was over 30%. I have to also be careful to point out that this is identified contributions – (some) members ... put (unidentified cash) in the plate. My contacts with other churches confirm that 30% of members not contributing is about average.

In looking at last year's contributions I have come up with a

couple of interesting numbers. Fully 99% of our financial support comes from 135 pledging families that each pledge more than \$150 per year. Let's call them the supporters of UCE.

You hear people talk about the 80-20 rule. That is that 80% of your pledges come from 20% of your members. Interestingly 80% of our donations come from 30% of our members. That means we are doing much better than the "rule." It means that our support is spread across a broader base of the membership. These 63 families all donate more than \$900 a year. Let's call these families the sustainers of UCE.

But what I find really interesting is that more than 53% of our pledges come from 26 pledges over \$2,000. These pledges are almost always from the families that are highly active in the church or who have a long association with the church. These are our visionaries. So where are you in this list?

under \$150 - a donor

\$150 to \$900 - a supporter

\$900 to \$2000 - a sustainer

over \$2000 - a visionary

Every donation of every size is gratefully received. But let me ask: Can you move to a higher category this year? I would love to see you do it!