

FIRST UNITARIAN  
CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY  
**BR**  **KLYN**  
A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

**Transforming Lives**

**Koren Manning**

(Member since April 23, 2006)



Before coming to First U, I had probably sat through less than a half dozen religious services in my life. I grew up “unchurched” in a secular family. So it was a little odd that my first semester of college I inexplicably signed up for a class on the “Historical Jesus”, my first foray into religious study. One concept in particular from that class made a deep impression on me - the idea of open commensality. This is the term religious scholar John Dominic Crossan uses to describe Jesus’s willingness to break bread with anyone - lepers, outcasts, prostitutes. This was one of Jesus’s most radical acts - in a society governed by strict social boundaries and hierarchies, he would sit down to eat with anyone. This sent shock waves throughout the communities he visited. Who we eat with speaks volumes about who we consider our kin, our tribe, our equals, and Jesus’s message was clear - we are all one family, and all equal in the eyes of God. Some say this was the true source of his miracles. I walked away from this class with a new perspective towards religion and the seeds of my own personal theology.

Years later, I walked through the doors of First U. I didn’t realize it at the time, but I was looking for people to break bread with. I had moved to New York City just a few months earlier and was horribly lonely. I had a few friends in the city, but not a close social circle, and no family. I came to First U on a cold snowy Sunday in December and was immediately invited to join a young adult brunch after services. Over a long and leisurely meal at the Tutt cafe, full of conversation and the warmth of new friends, I felt more at home than I had in months. Since then I’ve been blessed to share many meals with many members of this congregation, in their homes, in my home, at auction dinners, many more young adult brunches, fellowship group dinners and more. That’s how this congregation turned into my extended family, one meal at a time. Some of the moments at First U that most inspire me, and I believe bring us closest to living our deepest values, are when we open up our table to break bread with others - at our annual Ramadan dinner, our Passover Seder, last night’s Haitian solidarity dinner, and the many meals shared during last year’s Phoenix Rising program to support formerly homeless women. I feel privileged to be part of these events, which feel truly sacred, and hope that we continue opening our doors and table to an ever-widening circle of community.

First Unitarian has changed my life. Working together, we can change the world.

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