

FIRST UNITARIAN
CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY
BROOKLYN
A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

Transforming Lives

Abby Grosslein

Member since January 21, 2018



Good morning, beloved friends. My name is Abby and my pronouns are she/her/hers.

This is a hard time, and we're all struggling. But we all showed up this morning. I showed up this morning--you, who are listening right now, showed up this morning, and that means more than anything else.

Lately, I've been thinking about resilience and the contributions of women and people who identify as female or women in our congregation, and their work in the history of our church. Olive Hoogenboom, who I never had the pleasure to meet, has just passed away. She went on to the next chapter last Friday, and the next day I opened her book looking for inspiration. She talks about women in the congregation way back to the 1800s and early 1900s, and the first women's societies that were formed. I found exactly what I needed: there were women long before me who showed up and who said yes to the opportunities that were afforded them, that they fought so hard for. And that got me to stand here today and keep fighting. We never stop fighting, whether it's for women's right to vote, or housing for vulnerable people in the age of coronavirus. We never stop fighting.

Today I am here because of them. I am here because of my grandmothers who were deeply invested in their church communities. Their examples showed me the way. My grandmother, my mom's mom, participated in Garden Club and took me to Catholic masses with her. Even when my mom and I drifted away from the church, my Gramma Bee still loved us fiercely and cultivated her deep faith in her own way. My dad's mom wrote the newsletter for her UU church in Falmouth, Massachusetts for as long as I can remember. Like women at First U in the early 1900s, my MaG organized the Holiday fair and worked in the church office.

When I began my own religious life, I knew that I had to just show up to a church, and it would tell me how to get involved. So when I moved to New York, after almost a year of hemming,

hewing and searching, I walked through the doors of First U. Immediately, I knew I was home. I'll never forget how I felt that morning. My heart aches that I can't be in the building right now, but if we have learned nothing else from this global pandemic, it is that a church is not a building -- it's the people. Thanks to the deep love of our congregation and the hard work of Chris and Ian and our staff, I know it is waiting for us with open arms. When I go back, it will be just as it was in January 2016. I kept showing up, and going back, and talking to people. They told me about things that were going on in the church, and when opportunities were offered, I said yes: Women's Leadership Alliance, Green Team Sanctuary, craft ministry, young adult ministry, caring ministry, UniFair, the auction. First U gave me my life.

If I hadn't gone to First U, I wouldn't have met the Young Adult Ministry--back then, the TNT "Twenties and Thirties" group. I wouldn't have said yes to the retreat for young people where I met Linnea Patton. She had just received her Masters from City College. I would not have said yes even though the deadline for that Masters degree was a week away. But I said yes: I am going to apply to that program because it is my dream program. I said yes and I got my Master's. That experience--First U--changed my life.

If I hadn't gone to First U, I wouldn't have met Amanda White, now Amanda Stergianopoulou. When I needed an apartment in 2017, I looked on the Young Adult Ministry Facebook page and saw that Amanda needed a roommate TODAY, and I said yes, and within four days I had moved. (I'll never do that again!) I still live there. That experience--First U--changed my life.

This is on the nose, and I am sorry that I can't go deeper right now, but First Unitarian has changed my life. Working together, we can change the world.

April 26, 2020