

**Chalice Lighting, Reflections, Dreams, and the Ministry of Stewardship
from the Sunday Worship Celebration
of the 160th Anniversary of the Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden
October 26, 2014**

CHALICE LIGHTING OF THE MORNING

As the chalice was kindled by one of the children of this congregation, we spoke together:

May the flame of this chalice shine on our past,
on the bold souls who brought into their day the idea of universal love,
the foundation of this faith and this congregation.
May the flame of this chalice shine on our future,
lighting the path for all who will come after us
with new ways, new understanding, and braver love.
May the flame of this chalice shine on today,
as we celebrate the journey of faith that we walk together,
in love that lives across the ages.

REMEMBERING AND REFLECTING

Alan Dougherty
“Growing Up UU”

As many of you know, I grew up in this church. What was originally just a stop on my mom’s spiritual journey quickly became a new home. Not only did SHE find this accepting, validating congregation... my brother and I did, too. After a brief stint of incarceration one fateful Sunday at St. Paul’s Lutheran down the road (I cried from the moment I got there until the second I was released), I, too, was relieved to find a place to belong.

In a nutshell, I loved the RE program. We called it “Church School”. If you asked me then “why” I loved church school, I would tell you it was SNACKTIME! Or the neat books, or the way the rooms were set up, or how cool our teachers were. Fast forward a few years and ask me again? The friends I made. The sleepovers. Becoming involved with youth group and going to youth conferences. A few more years? THE BUILDING. It was a cool building. After every service my mom would attend discussion in the Farnsworth Room... something I looked forward to because it left us kids alone to our own devices. What would we do? We would EXPLORE.

A good number of this congregation is new and has never been in the Brownstone on Norwood Street. Let me tell you... the place had nooks and crannies. If you knew the right combination to the locks (they were all 2-2-5) you could see some magical places. Inside the pipe organ. up the bell tower. And if you were brave enough to make it down any of the really creepy spiral staircases, you were rewarded with the two-lane duck-pin bowling alley in the basement. But the best part by far was reached by ladder... remove a ceiling tile... climb up and carefully make

your way over catwalks and beams to an area above the sanctuary, where there were doors that opened up... giving us an amazing view straight down into the vast expanse of the room.

Anyway... I digress. I suppose my point is that whenever I asked if I could climb around inside the organ or ascend the rickety staircase up to the bell tower, I was always given a stern "please be careful." I never felt like I wasn't allowed. I was actually encouraged.

So if you ask me today what the RE program meant to me, I would sum it up with: We were encouraged to explore. Literally, spiritually, emotionally. Every Sunday, we were encouraged to be ourselves... to ask questions. We were individuals with our own opinions on things. We learned that other people have different opinions than our own. We learned that every person has worth and dignity... that other religions have worth and dignity. I think I was the only person in my high school class who learned about Jainism... or Zoroastrianism. Heck - Christianity, even... in an objective way, anyway.

Growing up in this church helped make me the person I am today: able to experience the world with an "is-ness" rather than an "expected-ness". More of an "it is what it is" mentality rather than a "but that's not what I was taught" outlook. I have my own opinions, but I'm not "opinionated". I easily see both sides to an argument. The only downside to this is when it comes to politics. To me, the words Democrat and Republican have neither positive nor negative connotations. I am completely colorblind when it comes to the polarization of politics. But is that really a bad thing?

Peg Kirkpatrick

I share some of my recollections of life in this church some 15-20 years ago. We are such a different community now than we were then. Then we were about the building in which we lived, we were about exploring our spirituality and about building community and *beloved connection within our walls*. Leaving the building allowed us to focus our attention instead on the work of building community *outside our walls*. But as I reflect on 20 years ago, the childhood saying is fitting: This is the church, this is the steeple, *look inside* and see all the people...

The Church:

Arriving 10-15 minutes early for Sunday morning service, sitting in the back of the cavernous sanctuary, which in its day could seat over 600, and watching as people quietly entered, enjoying the solitude, peace and the pink hue in the air from the light streaming through the huge stained glass windows with the depiction of Jesus blessing the children. There was something about the space that settled one as you entered. Our brownstone church on Norwood Street.

Feeling at home and in my element, in our large work kitchen during one of the regular potluck suppers or evening events and on some level taking for granted, the 8 burner, 2 oven cast iron stove, the industrial size sinks, the large center work table, all of which was ideal for our potlucks and for the soup kitchen held in our church one day a week. And of course Lloyd Duval's ingenious homemade locking system for our china closets and our silver.

Watching the kids, after the potluck, as they retired to the sanctuary to play hide and seek, a sanctuary no longer so peaceful and quiet. A sanctuary that was indeed home to them.

The sacredness one felt speaking from the great marble pulpit, looking out to the congregation sitting in this lovely space, the choir loft above and then raising ones eyes to the Tiffany designed stained glass depiction of the “Parable of the Sower of Seeds” through the seasons.

I recall sitting during services, particularly as we were readying to leave this beloved space in 2000 and 2001, and marveling at the workmanship of the hand carved pews, silently expressing gratitude for the gifts made by our forebears, for the artists who created the marble pulpit, the windows, the oak laid ceiling.

The Steeple:

Climbing the tight tiny spiral stairs to the bell tower and experiencing the complete darkness for the long 60 seconds in the middle of the climb as you hit the spot where no light was shining in from below or down from above.

After a potluck supper one evening, climbing to the bell tower to watch “silent” fireworks from Hubbard Park, which we could see from that perch, but not hear.

And of course the bells on Sunday morning, played beautifully by Janet Brooks.

The People:

From my familiar seat toward the back of the sanctuary on Sunday mornings, I felt a great sense of comfort and peace as families strolled in and settled themselves. Maureen sitting alone or with her kids, Drew and Kristen, but then she started arriving with this guy Bob, and then suddenly Maureen’s arm was around Bob. Jeff, gently rubbing Sandy’s back, as he does now. Expressions of affection welcomed. Feeling validated by those strong women who I could always count on to tear up during a service, Ollie, Marybeth, Ann, Mare and Terry. Wilbur Emmons, ever the gentleman, walking in with Flo’s arm in his, standing at the end of the aisle and allowing her to settle herself first before he sat down, both always with gentle smiles on their faces. These ever present and familiar images would calm me on a frenzied Sunday morning.

Playing with Sarah and Zach (our son) and occasionally another baby or toddler in our cooperative nursery, that Elaine Donovan and Tim and I created so we each had time to attend worship services.

Large and lively discussions after our services with 20-30 people at times in the Farnsworth Room.

Drums, Didgeridoos, violins, guitars, flutes, a large choir and of course the amazing organ and our wonderful musicians like Karen Schier, who filled our space each Sunday with beautiful music.

Overnight retreats at Senexet House on Roseland Lake in Woodstock, where one could really spend time exchanging ideas and develop deeper bonds over walks in the woods, structured activities and shared meals, not to mention the 90 minute car rides there and back.

Having the blessed presence of elders to mentor us. Elders who had been with us for decades, some of who were raised in our church: Normal and Lloyd Duval, Norma's brother Fred Glike and his wife Rachel, Flo and Wilbur Emmons, Trudy and Ad Sternberg, Don and Emily Looney, Etta Chambers, Bill and Mary Alice Doolittle, (both descendants of the Isaac C. Lewis family, who were major benefactors of our church), Dave Hebert (who supplied us with hand made candles for our silver chalice for years). They held our oral history and shared easily. I recall Flo Emmons' generous spirit as we readied to vote on selling our building, a painful time for many, that it was not her decision to make at this point in her life, it was a decision of the next generation who would be active in the community.

This is the church, this is the steeple, look *inside* and see all the people. The heart, the soul of the church is the people, their visions, their legacy; it is why I read their names.

Our forebears had a belief in the spirit of the community itself, of liberal religious thought. People like Noah Pomeroy, who first brought liberal Universalist visiting ministers to this town, did so in spite of community views that this was radical thinking. So meetings were held where available, parlors, a school, the local tavern (though the ladies were unable to attend those!). For over 100 years we were settled in a grand church with a steeple... however we have a rich history of our community meeting wherever made the most sense as long as we were an active voice. Once settled as the Universalist Society in 1854, the society voted to hold meetings every Sunday with or without sermons, using laymen or visiting ministers. Our history is rich indeed. We pay homage to the ideals of our ancestors in the way we practice our faith today. I am ever grateful to those who came before, for they laid the groundwork, and to our time in our brownstone church, for there we grew and developed community, and to who we are now as we reach beyond our walls, and to those who will come in the future.

Jeff May

It is the people.

Peg and I didn't compare notes, and most of my notes this morning are actually a list of names – many of the same names Peg just mentioned. But if you go back a little earlier in time, there's a notation on the bottom of a page here . . . this is something called “A History of Wallingford Connecticut” written in 1870 by Dr. Charles Henry Stanley Davis, MD. The history includes Meriden and Cheshire, both originally part of Wallingford – Meriden incorporated as a town in 1806, prior to that it was a parish of Wallingford. There is a chapter in the book “The Universalist Church” which documents the early years of this congregation in detail. At any rate there is a footnote here on the bottom of a page that provides some context here . . . I find it interesting. It says,

“The following is on the records of the First Congregational Church of this town, May 15, 1837: ‘Mr. Alson L. Talmadge, for embracing the doctrines of universal salvation, be no longer considered a member of this church.’”

It was very difficult for some of the people whose names we hear - those who were the founders of this congregation, Mr. Talmadge among them and, of course, Noah Pomeroy who really brought the whole notion of Universalism to Meriden; Isaac C. Lewis, his son-in-law also one of the founders of this congregation as well as the founder of the silverware industry that put this town on the map . . . We hear the names of Abraham Norwood, Jeremy Farnsworth, James Chapin and other ministers who led this congregation. These were brave people. Embracing Universalism was not a popular position to take in the first half of the 19th century, and although Connecticut officially disestablished the standing order in 1791 -- being drummed out of the church as Alson Talmadge was essentially meant being drummed out of society.

So they formed their own, and in 1854 The First Universalist Society – the forerunner of this congregation was established. There were 28 signatures on the founding “constitution” that late springtime Tuesday evening so many years ago.

And yet, like Peg I come back to the names of the people I remember – some now gone but names still known to many of us here, the names of those who sustained this congregation and moved it forward in the days leading up to and during the time when I first came to this congregation some 27 years ago and who really saw it through to the current day.

We have some of our own stalwarts here today . . . Lou Rinaldi and Randy Heath, and Donna Stimpson and Bob Muir, people who keep our building and operations going. But, for years and years the names that filled those spots were those of Lloyd Devaul, Frank Wieland and Fred Glide. These were the people who kept things going, literally for decades. I think of people like Bill and Mary-Alice Doolittle mentioned by Peg . . . Mary-Alice ran the treasury of the church on 3 x 5 file cards and kept those records in a shoebox . . . Bill was always ready to pitch in to fix something crumbling in that old brownstone building . . . a frequent occurrence. I think of Flo and Wilbur Emmons – those two gentle souls who would provide their wisdom when asked, but would never presume to offer it uninvited.

I think of Marjorie Tower . . . Ad Sternberg’s mother-in-law who was the “velvet glove” who went along with Ilene Beyor’s “iron-fist”. Ilene Beyor was the woman who was the church secretary as well as a member. A force to be reckoned with, Ilene in many ways “ran the church” and kept it going through some rather difficult times, always moderated by Marjorie and her very sweet way of making things okay.

I think of Mary Capers who was our Director of Religious Education who kept the church school going for so many years. I think of the ministers when I first arrived here – Bob Rafford, our “quarter time minister” who officially filled the pulpit and preached once a month, filled in by many lay service leaders and the monthly visit by Rev. Dr. W. Mason Olds. Dr. Olds I will always remember as the minister who led the first worship service Sandy and I attended at UU Meriden. Sandy and I walked in to that massive sanctuary in the old brownstone building and sat there in this enormous worship space – and there were probably only about thirty other people in the room with us. Now remember, this was a cavernous sanctuary that was designed to seat as

many as five or six hundred people, but at that time thirty was probably a pretty good turnout on a Sunday morning. Dr. Olds stood up at the pulpit to begin the service that morning and he said, “I’m going to begin with an apology because my first reading this morning will be from The Bible.”

I looked at Sandy . . . he looked at me . . . and as I recall we both said simultaneously . . . “Well, this could be interesting.”

There was Dr. William Muehl,¹ a professor at Yale Divinity School and a frequent speaker at our services – his liberal Christianity an interesting counterpoint to Dr. Olds Secular Humanist viewpoint. All of these people helped me find a new way of looking at religion, what it meant to be a religious person and what it meant to be a member of a religious community.

So again, as Peg said – for me this congregation is all about the people. It’s about the people we hear about who founded this congregation 160 years ago. It’s about the people who kept it going in the interim, the people who inspired me and who inspired many of you when you first came to this congregation. But most importantly, it is remembering that it is us now – those of us who are seated here over on *this* side of town, in *this* building, at *this* time who are carrying this evolving religious tradition forward. We here today are the ones who are writing the current chapter of the history of The Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden.

¹ *Subsequent to the delivery of these remarks I learned that Dr. Muehl, who was Professor Emeritus of Christian Methods at Yale Divinity School and a much beloved contributor to our worship experience during the late 1980s and early 1990s, died on May 8, 2014 in Tucson, AZ.*

Janet Hiller

The UU Church in Meriden has been at the heart of my life since Steve and I began attending on Easter Sunday, 1978. It is here that I've found my greatest validation, most of the people I consider friends (and not a little of our social life), and an atmosphere of liberal thinking, something that I don't find in other places. It is largely this church, along with life experience, that has brought me to a much more liberal point of view than I ever had in my early adulthood.

I was raised Dutch Reformed, a Calvinist, Bible-based religion, and I found the ministers to be rigid and closed to the ideas of other religions. Their readings were always from the Bible. By contrast, Rev. Charles Herrick, the minister when we arrived here, was eclectic in his choice of Sunday readings and sermon references. He was as likely to find wisdom expressed in the startling clarity and simplicity of the comic strip "Peanuts," as in the great philosophers, world religions--or the op-ed pages. His references to the Bible were few and usually prefaced by an apology: So many of us had made our way to UU-ism from other faiths, and some were trying to forget those faiths. Charles spelled "God" with two o's, and I've thought of God that way ever since.

This church was at that time quite humanist in its pulpit expression (in fact, Doug Peary was one of the guest ministers who preached at the old church). Sermons were more like Sunday morning lectures—something that I enjoyed and eagerly anticipated each week. I recall that a fellow congregant, Charles Uznanski, a physicist or astronomer I think, gave a couple of lectures. In 1996 or '97, at my invitation, Dr. Richard Selzer spoke at the old church. He was a writer of essays and stories, a physician, and the dean of Yale Medical School. His writing so impressed me with its humanist leaning; his compassion for his patients and for all people was so strong in everything he wrote, that he had a natural affinity with our congregation.

The church was solidly a family-size church; I remember many Sundays when attendance hovered around 30. Consequently, I developed relationships with other parishioners rather quickly, and two of these were to pave the way to a network of connections, which I still maintain today. Marjorie Tower, Ad Sternberg's mother-in-law, was a stalwart—although rather new—member of the UU Church in Meriden (we never called it UUCM at that time) who introduced me to a group of women who still meet regularly for study on a focused theme. Trudy Sternberg was also an influence on the way I've related to, and been accepted by, the Meriden community.

The church held retreats fairly often, at first at Senexet House in Woodstock, CT, a large old house in the woods near a lake. Later, we moved to the Mercy Center in Madison, the former home of W.T. Grant, located on several hundred feet of private beach. It was at one of these retreats that Dennis Kababik asked the rest of us if we were Apples or Pears: Did we attend church for ourselves or because of whatever social outreach the church was involved with? I still answer the same way: I'm an Apple. I come to church for my personal and spiritual growth, but I'm grateful that others are Pears because social outreach is so important. One action I recall—and in which I participated--was a protest at City Hall against the Iraq war. We marched to City Hall from our interim location at the Masonic Lodge and showed placards to passers-by. At least one person joined the church because of this protest.

In 1998 Steve and I attended the New England Leadership School, later called Northeast Leadership School (NELS), which was for board members and others who had or might someday have positions as officers or committee chairs. Through a week's worth of emotionally challenging and frustrating exercises, we learned to be more invested in the *process* than in the *outcome* of church decision-making. This is where we learned to begin meetings with check-in. Over a period of perhaps 10 years, about 16 congregants attended NELS.

This church was one of the original members in 1886 of the City Mission Society, which consists of representatives from most of Meriden's Protestant churches. I've represented this church since around 2004.

About 25 years ago I started hearing people say they wanted the church to be more "spiritual." I privately scoffed at the idea because I find spirituality in many places other than church, but our programs and Sunday sermons certainly reflect a great deal more spirituality today. Rev. Lucy Ijams introduced Small-Group Ministry with what she called Spiritual Sharing Circles, and I was one of the facilitators, working with a group that met for about six years at the Bradley Home, a Meriden residence for senior citizens. Two of the people in my Circle were UUCM members who live there.

The decision to sell our venerable brownstone church on Norwood St. was wrenching. It was built in 1893 and had many beautiful features, particularly a magnificent set of Tiffany windows. The building meant a lot to many of us, but once we had made the decision, we moved forward, renting meeting space at the Masonic Lodge on East Main St., and buying and soon remodeling part of this property.

This church has come a long way, and so have I. I still find friendship and purpose here; I give a great deal of my time, talent, and treasure, and I feel blessed to have found this community of liberal thinking and compassionate people.

Denis Picard

In a conversation just this past week, there was mention of the organ in the old brownstone. Now the memory of this magnificent instrument brought to mind the woman that I knew who had made it her mission to be its caretaker, Norma Duvall. Norma and her husband Lloyd were what you would call a vintage couple. They truly appreciated and did their best to care for legacies of distinction in their life. Luckily they saw the care of the old tracker organ as one of their legacies. Norma and her brother Fred grew up in the church and had fond memories of the building bustling with families and children.

The organ and sanctuary itself were one in the same, in that the sanctuary was quite literally the sound box for the organ. Norma did her best to find musicians who not only appreciated the old gal but could tease her into ecstatic reverie. In my time there was no one more up to this task than Alan Murchie. Alan was a Yale conservatory student who not only focused on ecclesiastical music but also was an organ *officianato*, Norma challenged him and he agreed. During his tenure no one put the organ through its paces better than Alan Murchie. He returned for the centennial celebration of the brownstone along with previous music directors Richard Hicks, Karen Shire and Fernando.

Now Norma and her brother Dr. Fred Glike, a clarinetist, were just a few of the members who found music their passion. Marjorie Tower and Trudy Sternberg, Ad's wife, were accomplished violinists. Bob and Ann Oakes brought a down home folksy approach to choir and music. There was a rich appreciation and participation on a level yet to be matched. The sanctuary was a veritable sound stage of various performances, and its massive presence swallowed the best attempts to overcome its acoustical ability.

Once we had sold the brownstone and moved to Masonic during the planning for this space, all that had faded away. We were in survival mode with no organ, the grand piano stored at Jeff and Sandy's house, virtually nothing but a small electric piano, an occasional boom box, and a life-size cardboard cutout of John Wayne. Yes, those were the days.

DREAMING NEW DREAMS

Megumi Yamamoto, President of the Congregation "Middles"

I have been thinking a lot about middles, lately. Maybe because it was my birthday yesterday. I turned 45, which feels very middle-ish to me. The women in our family tend to live into their 90s, so that could be accurate.

I'd like to share what Billy Collins has to say about the middle:

(excerpt from "Aristotle")

So last night I sat down with a giant sheet of paper and made a timeline of my life. I started with October 25, 1969: Tokyo, Japan. I put a big October 25, 2014, Cheshire CT at the other end. Then I added a midpoint around 1992, when I was 23.

Boy was that middle busy. I had so many things going on that it got kind of crowded. I got married, we bought our first house on Cottage Street in Meriden, I started my teaching career. And right there in the middle, I found this church. How perfect. I came in on the middle of a difficult conversation about what home meant to this congregation. But what kept me coming back was exactly that — home. I found a place where, in spite of all the commotion, there was peace. A place where I was comfortable to be myself. A place where I could always go and I knew they would take me in, to paraphrase Robert Frost. Although that middle was difficult, and I'm finding my own to be the same, one thing remains constant. Love. I kept coming back, grew my family, and now I find myself nurtured by the spirit of love into leadership.

Here we are, in the middle — a new middle. It's full of the same kinds of challenges, but again, whenever I walk in the door, love is here, love beyond belief.

Last night I added a whole new page to my timeline. A vast expanse of white paper stands ahead: the rest of my life. And here we are, in this church home. Looking toward the future,

remembering the past — knowing that we are in the best part — the middle — and dreaming about the possibilities of that blank page — knowing that we will always be at home, in love.

I'm so glad you're here with me.

Let's dream new dreams together.

A MINISTRY OF STEWARDSHIP

Carole Capen Kargher

One hundred and sixty years ago a group smaller than we are now showed Courage, Resolve and Faith in the Future when they built our first church building and signaled, "We are here!" They spent their Time, Treasure and Talent because they believed they had a message worth hearing.

Approximately fifty years ago, after a particularly difficult time, an even smaller remnant deliberated and ultimately showed Courage, Resolve and Faith in the Future. They kept the doors open and believed if they gave of their Time, Treasure and Talent this congregation would survive and thrive as a much needed liberal religious home in central Connecticut.

About fifteen years ago, a steadfast group did the hard work of walking away from a beautiful, but aging, building, believing that selling the property was the best way to ensure the survival of the congregation. It took great Courage, Resolve, and Faith in the Future to use their Time, Treasure and Talent to find this spiritual community its present home.

Just a few years ago, faced with a dwindling endowment and a congregation not quite large enough to support the ministry and the building here, this congregation once more stepped up with – can you guess? - Courage, Resolve and Faith in the Future! We called the Reverend Doctor Jan Carlsson-Bull to be our full time minister. Believing our liberal religious tradition is needed more than ever in Central Connecticut, we spent most of the remaining endowment. We believed that partnered with Jan, we could grow to support our Vision and Mission, and this is the year!

Our budget passed without scheduled drawdowns from the endowment. That means the only way to pay for our professional ministry and staff, for our building and grounds, and for the many programs we support within and without these walls is to give generously of our Time, Treasure and Talent. Our bank account is supported entirely by us now, so please, if you have been meaning to catch up on your pledge, now is the time! If your custom is to pay yearly or sporadically, please think of our monthly commitments and consider paying your pledge on a weekly or monthly basis. Our congregation is growing! It's making noise in the community! Won't you join with me in making sure The Voice of our Living Tradition continues to sound with – one more time - Courage, Resolve and Faith in the Future? Let's leave a legacy they'll be celebrating in another 160 years!