

**“Steering with Hope as Our Guide”<sup>©</sup>**  
**Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society**  
**The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, Minister**  
**December 14, 2008**

**SOUNDING OF BELL**

**CALL TO GATHER**

Come, Come Whoever Your Are, #188

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Come, come, whoever you are;  
Man, woman, parent, child  
Whatever your religious journey,  
Whatever your skin color,  
Whatever your ability,  
Whomever you love-  
You are welcome here this morning.  
You are welcome at our table.  
You are welcome in this religious home.

Good Morning! Welcome to the Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society. I am Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, and it is my great pleasure and privilege to serve this congregation. We welcome all of you. If you are a newcomer, and haven't signed our guest book in the entryway, please do so before you leave so that we may send you a newsletter listing our activities. If you have questions about Unitarian Universalism or are thinking about joining this congregation, we invite you to join us for coffee/tea after our service today and to speak with me or a member of the Membership Committee. You can recognize them during coffee hour, because they wear gold nametags. (Ask if there is anyone wearing a gold nametag today to stand.)

Later in the worship service newcomers will have an opportunity to introduce themselves, and we hope that you will do so, so that we can give you a proper welcome.

To parents, children are always welcome to stay in the service, or join the other children in our religious education classes.

Announcements:

Important parts of our community life are the invitations we give to one another for activities beyond our morning's service. Please note the announcements in your order of service.

(1) On Saturday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, we are sponsoring here a Small Group Ministry workshop, conducted by Rev. Dr. M'ellen Kennedy, to help establish here at MUUS broad congregational

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support and resources for these covenant groups, designed to give this membership opportunities to explore that which is intimate and ultimate in our lives. We are encouraging all members to come, especially those who wish to learn how to facilitate these covenant groups.

(2) I want to invite you to consider make an offering of flowers for this sanctuary for various Sundays throughout the year, in honor of a special event or in memory of a loved one. If you sign up at the back table, we will be able to share the memory of the event in the Order of Service.

(3) If you like to have sweets to eat and coffee and . . . to drink after our services, please sign up at the back table.

Here ends this morning's announcements.

**\* CHALICE LIGHTING & RESPONSIVE READING #733**

*"A Place of Meeting" (antiphonal reading)*

**\* HYMN 83 "Winds Be Still"**

**COVENANT (in unison)**

*Love is the spirit of this society.*

*Dwelling together in peace,*

*Seeking truth,*

*Helping one another,*

*Serving human needs,*

*Honoring the Earth and all that is,*

*This is our covenant.*

**OFFERTORY**

As we take our collection, we invite first time visitors to let the plate/basket pass them by, you are our guests today.

Let us now take an offering to sustain and strengthen this place, which is sacred to so many of us; a community of memory and of hope, for we are now the keepers of the dream.

(Braddock Lovely)

**SHARING JOYS AND CONCERNS\*\***

If you are visiting for the first time, or have come back after a long time, or if you are still getting to know us, we would love it if you would introduce yourself to us. It is purely optional, but we'd like to give you a proper welcome. Please raise your hand so we can bring you a mic.

Let the congregation say, "Welcome!"

And, now for our Joys and Concerns:

If you woke this morning with a sorrow so heavy that you need the help of this community to carry it; or if, in the spirit of thankfulness, you woke with gratitude in your heart that simply must be shared, now is the time for you to speak.

May all that is shared at this time be seen as holy.

Ring bowl.

### **SINGING THE CHILDREN ON THEIR WAY**

*As you go may joy surround you, as you go, go in peace;  
know our love is with you always, as you go, as you go.*

### **PRAYER AND MEDITATION**

In Words

Let us, as a community, hold in our hearts the concerns and joys expressed today:

#634 "Let us hold these joys and sorrows, named and unnamed, in the embrace of this community, knowing that it is who we are together, in good times and in bad, that sustains our spirits, individually and collectively."

Let us spend the next few moments, in silence reflection.

In Silence

In Song—Spirit of Life, #123

May it be so.

Amen

**SERMON**  
**"Steering with Hope as Our Guide"**

Leave pulpit.

When I came here for my interview and shared conversation with the Board, they asked me a question that I really didn't want to answer. I don't remember exactly how it was phrased, perhaps one of you will. But, it was something like this, "Which of the 7 principles troubles you most?"

I groaned. Inside I thought to myself, "well, we may as well go home." Outside, I said something like, "this is not going to be a popular answer, but I will tell you any way." With some hesitation, I said, the one that troubles me most, is the first one.

How many can name it without looking?

"We respect the inherent worth and dignity of every human being."

Now let me ask you. Without looking, who among you can name the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> principles?

"The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."

Return to pulpit.

On my very first day of seminary, I joined a doctoral level class with a dozen already ordained ministers of other faiths, none of them Unitarian Universalist. You can well imagine that I was still finding my personal voice and religious authority. I overheard one of them remark to several others, "Unitarian Universalists can believe, say and do anything they want. They can even be members of the KKK." And, then he laughed.

Sometimes in some of our congregations, I hear members describe to visitors, "Oh, you'll like it here – you can believe and do anything you want." At such times, I groan.

Our movement has a deep heritage of respecting other's beliefs AND it has just as deep a heritage of calling one another to live in right relationship, in covenant, with one another. Living out together, in community, our highest principles of respect, reason, and tolerance for one another, in compassionate and justice seeking ways. These are not things one can do in isolation. They can only be done in relationship to others, as part of a larger community

where members have a mutuality of desire to support one another, such that together we may call forth the best in the other.

Granted, to do this, we must respect the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. And, when we do, individuals can find sanctuary, and a place to blossom into the person they were meant to be.

#### PAUSE

At the 1998 UUA General Assembly in Rochester, NY, “Robert Bellah [a noted sociologist] [spoke of] the effects of hyper-individualism in our society, saying, “It is no accident that...the United States, with its high valuation of the individual person, is nonetheless the only North Atlantic society where such a high percentage of people live in poverty. [As our consumer driven society has placed the individual person’s wants and desires at the center of the altar of humanity], our capacity to imagine a social fabric that [can] hold individuals together is vanishing. [This] is in no small part due to the fact that our religious individualism is linked to an economic individualism which, though it makes no distinction between persons except monetary ones, ultimately knows nothing of [the] sacredness [of others held in community]. If the only standard is money, then all other values are undermined.”<sup>1</sup>

Bellah went on to say, that in his opinion, our Unitarian Universalist principles are upside down. He believes that we have placed the individual foremost at the center of our faith, and . . . “community” . . . (working for world peace and interdependence) comes almost as an afterthought at the end of our principles.

My specialty in ministry is in community ministry. For me that means the ministry of building communities that sustain and nurture the individual into living out their highest ideals. It means working with members of the community, to form healthy communities (congregations) that . . . by modeling healthy and right relationships . . . create nurturing and wholesome sanctuaries within which the individual and groups can discover their gifts and share them in ways that build yet stronger community.

I believe that when we commit ourselves to something bigger than ourselves (whether it be anti-oppression, social justice — or, for that matter, practices that hold a congregation together) we breathe Life, Purpose and Spirit into our individual and collective bodies. For me, this is sacred work, worthy of my life’s calling.

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation of the Larger Fellowship Archive Sermons: John Buehrens, “How Much Do We Deserve?” <https://secure.uua.org/clf/quest/2005/10/index.html>, October 2005, December 13, 2008

## PAUSE

As a community minister, I am a systems person. 99% of the time when I hear people blaming one another for some irritation, I see instead, communication and infrastructure issues that are placing people at odds with one another, often without their awareness. As a trained interim minister, I often see in congregations struggling for corporate health and wholeness, a lack of understanding and awareness of the transformational milestones each congregation needs to accomplish in order to create that sanctuary that offers transformative experiences for the individual and the congregation. As a community minister and trained interim minister, I see that without this larger perspective, the health of the congregation is often sacrificed to the needs of a few individuals. When that happens, it undermines the health of the community by making congregational decisions difficult to make, conflicts difficult to address, and maturational growth for the congregation difficult to achieve. Instead of sacrificing one for the other, there are ways and processes we can use, that allow for more opportunities to experience “both/and” as well as “win/win” outcomes.

We have decisions to make, here at Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society. At present, I am your consulting minister. There are a variety of roles I could take on here. The choice is yours.

If you had hired me as an interim minister we would certainly be working on the following transformation goals<sup>2</sup> for the congregation to help it move toward greater health and wholeness.

We would, together, work to:

- *Heal your griefs and conflicts and also claim and honor your past.*  
It is hard to move forward without the collective understanding of who you have been, the struggles you have shared and overcome, those struggles that hold you back, and the self-awareness of the recurring “ways of being with one another” that exist in the congregation.
- Come to terms with your unique identity, your strengths, your needs, your challenges. In this process, you would describe for yourselves what it is that you are good at, where you need help, and discern for yourselves the preferred qualities you want in your leadership, particularly the minister.
- Clarify the multiple dimensions of congregational leadership, both ordained and lay, and learn how to navigate the shifts in leadership that accompany times of transition.

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<sup>2</sup> Weston, John. “The Interim Opportunity”, UUA, Boston, MA.  
<http://www.uua.org/documents/westonjohn/interimopportunity.pdf> December 13, 2008

In this process, you would evaluate the effectiveness of your organizational structure, the ways in which you fill lay leadership positions, and the named and unnamed relationships between ordained and lay leadership.

- Renew connections with available resources, within and beyond the UUA  
Here we would seek out curricula, counsel, and other resources that will strengthen the congregation now and in the future.
- Renew your vision, strengthen your stewardship, prepare for transitions in leadership, and engage your future with anticipation and zest. Here we would, together, develop a common understanding of your future and strengthen your care of each other and of your religious community, so that no matter who your minister is, you have a sense of clarity about what your purpose is and reason for existing; thereby making transitions in leadership and ministry, less traumatic.

Other somewhat more specific goals that I would suggest that would reinforce these larger goals, are:

- The development of a congregation-wide covenant that establishes how it is that you, as members of this congregation, intend to be with one another, regardless of your theological or philosophical beliefs . . . naming the ways you will support one another in your spiritual journeys, aspire to manage and grow from conflict, acknowledge the needs of the congregation as a whole, and claim your transforming role in the larger community as an instrument for justice.
- Working together to strengthen your small group ministry covenant groups.
- Working together to strengthen other parts of the congregation such as leadership development and religious education.
- Working together with UUA Social Justice Empowerment trainers to help this congregation name, for a given period of time, its particular focus for justice work as a whole congregation, while also affirming the value of individual member’s passions for particular social justice and community building activities. As a UUA Social Justice Empowerment Trainer, I can assure you that this IS possible and, done well, can strengthen the health of this congregation, giving it new vision and purpose.
- Conduct and integrate into a visioning process, an internal survey (available through the UUA) to name the values and needs of the individual members of this congregation; and, an external demographic survey (also available through the UUA) that tells you what the needs and opinions are of the larger community. Thereby helping you determine what the fit is between this congregation’s developed identity and vision, and the larger community’s needs. These surveys are important to understanding who you are, what the market is for Unitarian Universalism in this area, and what you might offer to others who are looking for a place like MUUS.

## PAUSE

At the last board meeting, I left the room for a few moments to look for a new resource for the board, and when I came back, someone said to another, “She’s really making us work!” We laughed.

But it’s important that you hear the most important word in that sentence. It is not “she”, nor “making”, nor “work.” It is the word, “us.”

I can minister to you in pastoral ways whereby I attempt to do my best to provide for your pastoral and Sunday gathering needs, simply and pretty much on my own. Frankly, that would be an easier road for all of us.

Or, if you want, I can minister to you in these ways:

- holding up a mirror so you can see some things you have had no particular reason to notice for awhile;
- helping you come to terms with your history, celebrating glories, grieving losses, letting go, moving forward;
- working with your lay leaders and staff to unstick stuck places and get the kinks and tangles out – in other words, to give the operating system a tune-up; and, to enable you to experience a different model of ministry, one of shared ministry, so that your capacity to choose well, in meeting the needs of the congregation is strengthened.

[Rubber Band Exercise]

If we were to decide to take this path of transformation, then my purpose in being here would be to join you as a guide, as someone who observes and listens. As someone who will sometimes warn of threats from outside and sometimes warn of perils from within. The board’s role would be to facilitate and manage our resources such that you, the congregation, would have the opportunity to achieve these goals. Your participation in the current Clara Barton District Growth Initiative project, is one such example of the commitment that leaders of this congregation have made to you, its current members, and those we do not know yet . . . but who will be our legacy.

The choice and the blessing to the world is yours to make.

Building a stronger community that offers a place of sanctuary and growth for individuals requires shared ministry. It requires that all of us contribute their respective gifts to the

degree we are able, but perhaps more important, it requires we show up for the party! For those events designed to move the congregation forward in its transformational milestones.

What I need, and what I suspect your current leadership needs to know is what your hopes and dreams are for the congregation, and whether you will share the responsibility of accomplishing these transforming milestones.

PAUSE

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "People wish to be settled. Only insofar as they are unsettled is there any hope for them."

It is precisely in the midst of these moments of transition that we have the greatest opportunity for reflection, healing, and transformation.

During this past year, your lay leadership has born the burdens and joys of guiding this congregation past shoals and other hazards. They have done a praiseworthy job (halleluiah!) not because they have accomplished milestones (though they have), but because they have stayed the course *even when there were no markers to guide them.*

They are here, still, because they know this congregation, this vessel of hope, carries precious cargo . . . you . . . its members, this congregation, and the legacy of many lives touched for nearly 30 years.

Those of you not in leadership positions have stayed the course as well. You are still here, you are the *essential* element of hope in this Unitarian Universalist community, for without you, there is no hope and no future. It is by the sharing of your gifts and enthusiasm that this community of souls will offer to those who walk in our doors now, and those who come looking for us in 10 years . . . hope.

May we each be a guide to those living in a world of transitions. Collectively, may we each hold out to one another, hope in our hands, hope from our hearts, the promise of hope yearning for a new tomorrow.

Amen and Blessed Be.

### **REFLECTION AND RESPONSE (congregation)**

**\* HYMN #360 "Here We Have Gathered"**

**CLOSING WORDS by Rev. Jeanne Lloyd**

May we be true to our soul and heart's desire,  
Sharing the precious gift that we are with others.  
May we learn to stand in the center of the fire with others,  
And not shrink back.  
May our work together create beloved community.

Let the congregation say, "Amen!"

**EXTINGUISHING OF THE CHALICE**