

21st Century Religious Leadership

PAINT BRANCH UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

October 30, 2005 • 10:00 am

Below the Order of Service are the primary messages delivered this day:
Call to Worship, Flaming Chalice Dedication, two Homilies, and Closing Words

Today we conclude our celebration of Paint Branch Co-minister **Barbara ten Hove's** 20th anniversary of ordination. (Last Sunday she preached about her "odyssey.")

Our special guest ministers, the Revs. **Neil Gerdes** and **John Tolley**, are faculty from one of the two UU seminaries: **Meadville Lombard Theological School** in Chicago, where Barbara got her Masters of Divinity in 1985 and where she is now engaged in a Doctor of Ministry program.

PRELUDE	<i>Wedding Day at Troldhagen</i>	E. Grieg
	David Chapman, <i>pianist and music director</i>	
WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS	Barbara W. ten Hove, <i>co-minister</i>	
CALL TO WORSHIP	Jaco B. ten Hove, <i>co-minister</i>	
HYMN #212	<i>We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle</i>	
FLAMING CHALICE DEDICATION	Neil Gerdes, <i>Meadville Lombard faculty</i>	
CHOIR	<i>Where the Music Comes From</i> "I want to grow, to feel, and to love."	L. Hoiby
HOMILY	<i>Faces in Formation</i> John Tolley, <i>Meadville Lombard faculty</i>	
INTONATION	<i>Album Leaves, Op. 124 no. 3 (Part 1)</i>	R. Schumann
HOMILY	<i>21st Century Leadership Challenge: Leaning In</i> Jaco ten Hove	
INTONATION	<i>Album Leaves, Op. 124 no. 3 (Part 2)</i>	R. Schumann
SHARING OF JOYS AND SORROWS		

**** MUSIC NOTES **** *Woyaya*, written by Ghanaian drummer Sol Amarifio, is the title song of a 1971 album by Oisibisa, a musical group of Ghanaian and Caribbean musicians. It is included in the new UUA Hymnal Supplement, *Singing the Journey*. This arrangement, by Jeanne Gagne, comes from the version by Ysaye Barnwell (of Sweet Honey in the Rock), and features Mark Cornick and Jaco ten Hove on percussion.

CALL TO WORSHIP — 10/30/05 — Jaco ten Hove, *co-minister*

Even those of you who are not true baseball fans might remember the spectacle in Baltimore a few years back when long time Oriole Cal Ripkin passed a significant milestone, setting a new record for most games played consecutively: well over 2,000 in a row without missing a day at work.

I suppose Barbara's 20 years in parish ministry is not quite at that unusual pinnacle, but it's getting there, and it's way more important to me (even though I'm a big baseball fan, too). I'm very proud of her—on a regular basis, actually—but this occasion provides reason to be especially so.

The anniversary we're celebrating with her this month—last Thursday the 27th was the precise day of her ordination in Reston, VA, 20 years ago—is not about any particular feat or accomplishment, but like, Cal Ripkin, she deserves acclaim for her longevity, her persistence in a field that can fiercely weed out those not really up for the challenges of this particular career.

(She and I both can point to the majority of our entering seminary classes, potential colleagues who are no longer on the parish ministry map.)

And also like the wonderful hoopla that accompanied Cal Ripkin's milestone, this celebration is easily extended to all others who have done what they do for a long time. So, as I call us into worship this morning I invite you to share this moment with her, especially if you've been steadily dedicated to any endeavor of meaning in your life. In all our own unique and interactive ways, we build the beloved community of meaning and hope.

Last week Barbara led the service and preached on her journey. Today we—Neil, John and I—get to speak a bit about her and about progressive religious leadership more generally—words blended, as we like to do here, with excellent music and, today, dance, culminating in a Postlude to write home about, so I advise you not to slip out early. Right after that will be a cake reception for Barbara, with great thanks to Committee on Ministry members Noel Monardes and Karen Morrill.

Barbara's 20 years in ministry also represent an era when women have stepped forth in religious leadership and helped deepen our movement. Their contributions can often also be extended to provide meaning and hope for all of us, as in song #212 in your hymnals, "We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle," which was written by a Unitarian Universalist to complement the more traditional song of the same melody on the opposite page...

FLAMING CHALICE DEDICATION — PBUUC —10/30/05

Rev. Neil Gerdes, on staff at Meadville Lombard Theological School since 19173, current titles: *Library Director* and *Associate Professor of Bibliography*

It is indeed wonderful to be here with you this morning to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Barbara's ordination. I had the great and good pleasure of being on the faculty of the Meadville Lombard Theological School when Barbara came there to study. Her continued friendship, along with that of Jaco's later, has been one of the most rewarding privileges of my life in this movement.

When Jaco asked me to do a personal moment for Barbara at this service, I thought very quickly of two directions of Barbara's ministry that began, I think, at seminary. The first was in the context of our religious community at the school. Thinking about Barbara in church community seems most natural. She was destined, I think, for the parish. Coming to seminary straight out of college, as Barbara did, was not so common in those days, when most students were coming into ministry as a second career. But being the child of a UU minister and growing up around churches, Barbara knew from early on that ministry was also her calling.

So maybe it was not so surprising, then, that despite being the youngest student in the whole school, Barbara was a leader in the community. At every chapel she made an announcement for the building of community; at every event she took some role or other in shaping our community. Almost every student in our community, and several faculty members, had some sort of pastoral interaction with Barbara. She empowered us all. Or, in the words of our distinguished Unitarian Universalist forbearer and former president, John Quincy Adams, she knew that “Individual liberty is individual power, just as the power of a community is a mass compounded of individual powers.”

The second avenue that I think Barbara’s ministry has taken in a productive direction is her use of authority. Let me illustrate by briefly relating a story about what I can say, after over thirty years at Meadville Lombard, was the most memorable student led chapel service I ever experienced. (And I might interject that I have been on a joint appointment with the Chicago Theological Seminary for over twenty years; so between two schools with chapels every week, I’ve seen a lot of student chapel services.)

This particular chapel service was led by a visiting German scholar who had decided to do a sort of pagan Walpurgisnacht celebration, complete with colorful robes, dim lights, haunting music on the organ in the background, and a burning caldron of rum punch. Unfortunately, despite the advice of those standing by, as well as contrary to the warning in red on the bottle’s label, he decided to pour even more of the 151 proof rum into the flaming punch.

Not surprisingly flames then sparked up that fluid path into the bottle itself. His trying to shake them out of the bottle only turned the bottle into a rather amazing flamethrower. I won’t go into all the details of the chaos that ensued when the clothes of a few worshipers in the direct line of the flames shooting out of the bottle’s end caught on fire. Suffice it to say at this point, just in case you have become alarmed and worried, no one, as it turned out finally, was really hurt, thank goodness, in all the commotion that followed. Nonetheless there were lessons learned a plenty by all the current and future ministers present.

The first lesson was about the combination of high proof liquor and fire as not being liturgically or in any other way worth the dangers. But most instructive was how each of us reacted. Some folks quite naturally helped put out the flames of those on fire, although in one case that wasn't so easy because the guy had to be chased down first from running about. (I know because I was one of those chasing him down.) Another person, quite bravely I thought, but actually quite astutely, put his hand over the top of the bottle and extinguished the flame rather quickly by cutting off its air.

Now, what our Barbara Wells did provides us an insight to her and her ministry, although some found her reaction rather odd. Barbara went out the door and found a policeman, and brought him back. As in any oral tradition, accounts vary as to what the officer actually said upon surveying the scene when Barbara brought him into the chapel. But even though there were people with some parts of their clothes missing in a darkened chapel, and even though the caldron was still flaming with a man in long robes trying to put it out, things were enough under control that no one was arrested, or even reprimanded. Indeed the very presence of this outside authority seemed to have an additional calming influence. After he left, everything seemed to have been judged, and the crisis resolved.

And here at last is the point I am trying to make through this story. I think Barbara responded with some very good instincts. I may be over interpreting here, and Barbara can give you her own version in coffee hour, but I think what she was doing was trying to bring through the introduction of this authority figure some order out of chaos. In, I hope, a related example on using authority, I quote the words of a noted liberal thinker, Margaret Benson, from her work on rational faith:

“Progress,” Benson says, “takes place through the correction of that which has been received as authority. Without that authority, accurate and inaccurate together, there would be nothing even to correct. Progress is not made in spite of authority, but by means of it.”

And that, I suggest, is what Barbara has done quite admirably during her twenty years of ministry since seminary, namely to use her own authority and that of others, and not just policemen, but laypeople, and denominational structures, and church communities, altogether, to bring good things out of and from disorder.

So this morning I light this chalice—a much more appropriate, reasonable and lovely symbol of tradition, I might add, than rum punch—to honor the Rev. Barbara Wells ten Hove and her twenty years of ministry in the Unitarian Universalist faith. I salute her because she has been a dedicated and an effective user of hers, and all of our, authority to build our beloved community.

HOMILY #1: *FACES IN FORMATION* — PBUUC — 10/30/05

Rev. John Tolley, Meadville Lombard Theological School *Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services* and *Associate Professor of Ministry*

The training of ministers in the Unitarian and Universalist traditions has evolved significantly in the 162 years of Meadville Lombard’s history. Founded by Unitarians from the east in 1844 in Meadville, Pennsylvania, the school was to serve the liberal religious movement on the fringes of American civilization. Essentially, eastern intellectuals saw their mission as taking young men—yes, in those days they were all young “men”—off the farms and giving them the cultural graces, as well as the academic foundation, expected from a “learned clergy.”

Some of the early training, as Neil Gerdes can tell you from our library archives, included proper grammar and how to pour tea! Even in Neil’s earliest days, a somewhat anachronistic president lectured the “boys” on how to place their calling cards on the butler’s silver tray when making pastoral calls in homes. As you might guess, both tea and silver trays have fallen off the curriculum, but the strong tradition of the “learned” clergy was a major factor in the school moving to Chicago in the 1920s to be near the center of scholarship at the University of Chicago and the cluster of other denomination’s seminaries on the city’s south side.

In the 21st century, Meadville Lombard continues to place considerable emphasis on the importance of scholarship in the preparation of religious professionals, whether ordained or lay practitioners. Today, residential master of divinity students are still required to take a least four of their 24 academic courses from the University of Chicago. But in the last decade, with the encouragement of our alumni/ae, many of who are from Barbara’s generation, there has evolved a new emphasis on the practice

of ministry as well as academic acumen. With rigorous academic exercise as a foundation, today Meadville Lombard is preparing the next generation of parish ministers, religious educators, pastoral care providers, chaplains and community organizers.

We are finally taking seriously the necessity of articulating a liberal religious theology appropriate to a shrinking, global reality. The goal is to redefine language around “moral values” in this country which, in my opinion, is bordering on the brink of a conservative theocracy. This is the message we passionately believe that we must carry into our churches, hospitals, classrooms, offices and, perhaps most importantly, into the public square: a theology of inquisitive respect for the diverse ways people order their faith and an inclusive sacrament that that refuses to separate the saved from the unsaved, the secular from the sacred.

And the faces of the students who are now in the formative process of becoming ministers illustrate for me a new awareness of this call to cultural change.

Craig is a third-year student who said to me in class near the end of his first year at Meadville, “If I’d known how much I was going to change in this process, I might not have come to theology school!” I explained to him my fervent belief that he would have changed just as much in the ensuing time, either in or out of school. But the daunting demands of preparing to be a minister mean that you name, examine, ingest and understand the elements of each of those changes. Each one will inform your ministry.

Ministry demands that you bring the total of your self to your work every day. Consequently, it is precarious not to “know” that self in the deepest, most intimate and profound ways possible. When people say “yes” to their private sense of call to religious service, they are saying “yes” to the best and the worst of who they are and were created to be.

I have served on the admissions committee since I first arrived at Meadville Lombard seven years ago. A truth about our process is that in many ways it is self-selecting. We admit close to eighty percent of those who apply. I believe that’s because the best candidates understand what will be asked of them in the formation process and only

after conscious deliberation have the courage to take the risk to face that kind of change and self-knowledge.

Also, most, but not all, are coming from other careers and have come to understand that their service to liberal religion and the institutions that serve it are the most important way they can help change and save a world dominated by division and violence. Most come because they ethically believe there is nothing else of such worth which they can do with their one, precious life, to use Mary Oliver's phrase.

Fred is a second-year student, near 50 years of age, who had fought hard and long for people living with HIV and AIDS in western Connecticut. Starting with nothing, he organized volunteers, created a foundation, and launched the first service organization of its kind in that area. This was at a time when the stigma around the disease caused many politicians and community leaders to distance themselves from such efforts.

Now, at the organization's events and fund-raisers, the community's movers and shakers line up to be included. This was a worthy career, no one would argue. But Fred believed that his voice would be magnified and his personal theology of care would be deepened by theological study and ordination. There seemed nothing else of such worth he could do with his one, precious life.

Kathleen, a third-year student, was a teacher and homemaker. With her son entering school, she felt moved to address a call that had been in the back of her mind for years, but had been silenced by the responsibilities of married life and motherhood. She and her husband sold a house, packed up their son, and left a secure life in upscale suburbia to live in student housing and face the change of formation. Kathleen is a textile artist, and when she learned of the number of homeless people in Chicago who had no warm clothes for our severe winters, and of the single mothers who left hospitals with nothing in which to dress their new-borns, she organized a group of students into a "knitting ministry."

The students were soon joined by other members of First Unitarian Church in Chicago, across the street from Meadville Lombard, as well as other folk from the Hyde Park neighborhood. In total, those folk made hundreds of garments and

blankets for street ministries and hospitals to give to clients and patients over the course of two winters. This autumn, we received a thank you note from a hospital chaplain thanking the school for supporting Kathleen's ministry. She was particularly grateful for beautiful infant blankets to give to poor mothers whose newborns didn't survive but who had no swaddling cloths for their children's burials. There seemed nothing else of such worth that Kathleen could do with her one, precious life.

People we have interviewed for matriculation next year include a labor-organizer from the northwest and the Chief Information Officer of one of the largest corporations in the United States. I continue to be amazed and gratified year after year at the "quality" of people seeking an education at Meadville Lombard. That reality reassures me that the future of our movement is in good hands.

Why? Because almost to a person, these are people not afraid, even eager, to deepen their own personal spirituality and face the changes that inevitably come with that process. They are people seeking to learn how to articulate a new theology for this new world so that our witness to the wider world has strength and "religious rationale." And they are people who have come to understand that the highest calling of their life's work is to dedicate it to this institution we call Unitarian Universalism.

Dare I say, somewhere, in the depths of their hearts they understand that such dedication is the only salvation for human life. They understand that there is nothing else of such worth that they can do with their precious lives.

On this day that we celebrate Barbara's 20 years of ministry, as her faculty advisor, her colleague and friend, I can declare she stands firmly in this tradition. Our faith, our institution is richer for, and blessed by, her presence.

HOMILY #2: 21ST CENTURY LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE: LEANING IN

PBUUC —10/30/05 —Jaco B. ten Hove

Thank you, John, for portraying some "faces in formation" of those who have heard the call to professional religious leadership, as Barbara did 2+ decades ago. I would

add that these professional ranks also include plenty of folks who do not seek ordination, per se, but pursue important congregational and community building careers, such as our own Carla Miller, director of Religious Exploration here.

In fact, let me remind you that our UU tradition is quite adamant about *sharing* leadership and authority between lay and ordained, between volunteer and professional—all of whom can be equally committed in their hearts to the vision of a thriving UU network of opportunities and meaning. It may be easier to function under a hierarchy with clear vertical lines of authority, but we're busy pioneering a different path that feels more appropriate for a 21st century that honors diversity rather than suppressing or minimizing it.

I am only three years behind Barbara in the arc of ordination, and our generation of ministers bridges two chronological centuries, two millennia, even. This humbling perspective inspires reflection on where we've come from, where we're going and what really matters. Barbara has always had a way of focusing our attention on what matters.

So to honor her anniversary today, I want to express now a threefold challenge for the 21st century that I believe applies equally to all who would provide leadership to our noble yet fragile liberal religious movement, including any of you who want to be included. Then I'll describe a guiding image that can help move us toward meeting all three challenges.

First is the increasingly important need for us, here in the most over stimulated culture in the history of the world, to center ourselves in deeply effective spiritual and worship lives. Certainly our individual health, both physical and mental, benefits greatly from the stress-reduction and empowerment that accompanies a rich inner life, well-grounding in authentic religious practice.

UUism does not dictate what that practice might be, so it is up to you to figure out what path provides sustenance to feed your soul. However, I suspect that many of us are, shall we say, easily distracted from this goal of spiritual depth and discipline, and our interior lives are more shallow than we might like. We hunger to find meaning and purpose beyond the seductive but escapist materialism all around us.

Thus this first challenge: to increasingly center ourselves in deeply effective spiritual and worship lives. You can do some of that alone, but at other times you need the cooperation and companionship of peers. It is a dynamic, if demanding path, often subversive of the mainstream culture, and not generally responsive to a consumer approach, so you need a different set of muscles to lift those weights. How's your spiritual fitness these days?

Meanwhile, I say the need for this greater individual centeredness is increasing not just because it reduces stress or provides other personal benefit, but also because of what's at stake and what we as UUs can bring to the table. Honest leaders can only truly lead *from* that centered place within.

You may have noticed that here in the 21st century we are embedded in a culture that is increasingly emphasizing and using rather narrow religious values to make significant decisions that affect our commonwealth. I think it matters that those decisions be made from a perspective that upholds the common good.

I also feel that our liberal religious perspective is very well suited to help that process along and improve the commonwealth without crossing important church/state boundaries. But our voice is often weak, individually and collectively, and our values do not seem to be impacting much beyond our own congregations, if there, even.

Thus my second challenge for 21st century religious leaders: to strengthen our individual UU identities and our collective spine so that we might speak up where necessary to provide an alternative religious vision to counter the obvious rise of reactionary, regressive religion that is doing damage to our country and too many of its people.

The burgeoning strength of our model—when we uphold the common good, rest in the truth of interconnectedness, and respect diversity—is going to make the difference in this critical century, or we are likely to completely disappear under an avalanche of fear and contraction.

But make no mistake about it: liberal religious leaders will have to step out on some scary edges to articulate what is not yet a popular or even understood platform. We are challenged to find more spine behind a louder voice—and not just politically, but religiously, too. Are we up to it?

One way each of us can improve the odds that our values will have influence is to belong to and support something that is greater than any individual. Thus, my third challenge for those who would lead in this century: build healthy, value-laden institutions that will outlive you and thrive into the future.

Too often back in that 20th century (and even in the 19th!), we religious liberals would get in our own way and let squabbles and dysfunctions separate us or dilute our momentum. The challenge before us today is to honor the free church heritage without letting freedom run so wild that little of lasting value can be sustained.

We celebrate freedom best when we yoke it to responsibility—especially responsibility for the future, which our institutions will be witness to a lot longer than any of us will. I think of the initiative here to become an increasingly “Green Sanctuary,” actively embodying our ecological principles, taking institutional responsibility for the future of this site.

And “leadership” is manifested in more ways than activity level. *Financial* leadership is also extremely important—essential, even. That’s no small part of building something that will withstand the vicissitudes of time and carry on in ways that have meaning to you.

I want Paint Branch to be and *know* itself to be a vital congregation, a beacon of integrity and opportunity, modeling an authentic path deeper into this new millennium, showing the way to thrive amid diversity, with a radical inclusivity that opens doors to a fulfilling future. The wider UU world is aligned with this and provides many allies, so we’re not in it alone, to be sure.

We are in it together, to whatever extent you *want* to be in it together.

These three challenges for the 21st century—to increasingly center ourselves in authentic, effective, spiritual, worshipful lives; to strengthen both our individual UU identity and our collective spine; and to build healthy institutions that will outlive us—these are all supported by a simple guiding image.

Think of this congregation—and any functioning group, really—as a circle of human energy. Circles are powerful, naturally occurring shapes and the whole of any organization can be symbolically rendered as individuals standing in a circle together. So imagine us here as if we were all in a ring, standing loosely next to one another—not holding hands, though, and with space for others to join the circle later.

Notice *how* you are standing in this metaphorical circle. By our individual postures, we represent the community energy, which orbits around a center point. At the center of any group, large or small, is its purpose, its mission, its heritage, its reason for being—the meaning of why that group continues to exist.

By our postures in this circle, we all have a visible relationship to that center point. Basically, our symbolic stance represents our interest level. We might well be looking in toward that central purpose, interested and active. Or we might be looking past it or away. We might be turned sideways, with our attention elsewhere, or even with our back to the center. We might be off at a short distance, looking for a place in the circle or hesitant to stand with the others right now.

I maintain that the challenge to leaders of progressive 21st century groups, such as UU congregations, is to improve the odds that more and more of the participants in our circles are *leaning in* toward that group's purpose, engaged and interested in what's going on and what it means—to them and to the world.

It's a simple equation, really. The more people are actively leaning in toward the symbolic center of a group, the more vitality there will be in that organization, and vitality inspires fulfillment. 21st century leaders—lay and ordained, volunteer and professional—can posture themselves and focus their energy so that more and more of their group is *leaning in*.

What that looks like in any given setting at any given moment will change, and leaders are the ones who stay alert to that customized dynamic. But the overall goal is to invite, encourage, and yes, challenge our people to *lean in* toward the abiding values we embody. And thus, the circle thrives.

As we increasingly center ourselves in deeply worshipful lives; as we strengthen our religious identity and our spines; and as we build healthy institutions that will outlive us, may we also cherish the relationships that sustain us along the way.

I've been lucky enough to share a productive ministry with my life partner as we've been leaning in together here at Paint Branch with you. "On and on the circle's moving...sisters and brothers." May *your* leadership help it grow and thrive for all of us and more of us...

CLOSING WORDS — PBUUC —10/30/05 —Jaco B. ten Hove

We are all faces in formation, aren't we, wanting to grow, to feel, and to love?

On and on the circle's moving, as we—sisters, brothers all—articulate a new theology for this new world.

For the power of a community is compounded of individual powers, leaning in toward a vision of upholding the common good as we strengthen our spiritual spines and nurture the relationships and institutions that sustain us.

There may be nothing else of such worth we could do with our precious lives.

Thank you for helping to build our beloved community of meaning and hope. We are headed into an uncertain future, but we know within that we'll get there together, yoking freedom and responsibility, honoring the spirit of life, and singing and dancing all the way...

[Cue choral/dance presentation of *Woyaya*...]

END.