

STEPPING FORTH, THEN AND NOW

— Founders Day/Association Sunday —

— A service by Jaco B. ten Hove — Paint Branch UU Church — Oct. 14, 2007 —

CALL TO WORSHIP

I add my welcome... Today we gather to celebrate Founders Day, as we have done each mid-October for some years. It is right and encouraging to somehow, each fall, recognize our congregational roots and today we perform a happy ceremony for the first time, honoring those among us with 25 or more years here.

Today we also participate in the latest incarnation of Association Sunday, when we lift up the wider connections we share with UUs near and far, with whom we are in significant association. You may or may not realize or feel it, but there is a rising tide among all of us in this Association, which has culminated in an appropriately ambitious campaign to increase our collective presence in the marketplace of religious ideas in America.

The campaign is called “Now Is The Time,” after a phrase used by WEB DuBois, who said, “Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient time. It is today that our best work can be done.” Our magnificent CHOIR will shortly present a song of this title, written by UUs to complement this notable campaign. The song says:

Love is the lesson and legacy we know... Now is the time for vision and courage...

This message resounds among us not only for our next steps forth into an uncertain and often unsettling future, but also as we look at our history, where we see love, vision and courage animating our Paint Branch founding generation. We especially honor the longstanding connections of many of our currently active people, whose names are listed on the cover of your Bulletin. They/you are blessings among us, and we shall lift them up individually in a few moments.

I call us into worship today in the spirit of love, vision and courage...

FLAMING CHALICE DEDICATION — Honoring 25+ Year Paint Branchers

With Paul Wester, *board chair*, Carole Valliere, *New Member Ministry*, and John Bartoli

“Now is the time for hearts to be open...” as we call to the fore those who have been stepping forth in the life of this congregation for at least 25 years, a few of whom have been Paint Branchers since they were raised here.

We honor all their stick-to-itiveness, their creativity, their friendships—important elements of community that have added and continue to add to the glorious mix that is PBUUC. To them we will dedicate our Flaming Chalice this morning and we have a couple small gifts to offer each of the households so represented. (As, as befits celebrations such as this, there will be cake after the service.)

I now invite Paul Wester, our current board chair, who himself spent some growing up years in the RE Building next door, to read the imprint on the Certificate of Honor. He will be followed by Diane Niedzialokowski, just finishing her run as chair of the New Member Ministry Team, who will explain how a longtime UU but very recent Paint Brancher, Carole Valliere, jumped right in and joined our New Member Ministry Team this year and with her wonderful new eyes, made a suggestion for the second, more personalized gift we have to offer (small branches from our grounds, painted silver—the 25 year anniversary color—and adorned with colorful ribbon handles)...

**In appreciation for at least 25 years of connection to
Paint Branch Unitarian Universalist Church,
The Board of Trustees hereby issues to**

this *CERTIFICATE OF HONOR* as an expression of our gratitude.

**We recognize and value many years of time and money freely given,
important wisdom to help guide this congregation, and
faithful perseverance that has been an encouragement to us all.**

We will now read the litany of names and invite those who were able to be with us this morning to either stand or wave as you hear your name, so that our gift bearers can bring you these tokens of our esteem. Performing in this role will be Tim Illig, the incoming chair of the New Member Ministry Team, Carole Boston, Board liaison to the Team, and Carole Valliere herself. After all the names have been read, we will ask those present to rise together again for a collective salute—*HUZZAH!*

Following that, we will hear a concluding tribute from one of our most creative members, John Bartoli, which will lead us into the CHOIR piece, “Canticle of Brother Sun,” composed by another UU, Jim Scott, which was “purchased” at last year’s Church Auction by Paint Branchers Carol Carter Walker & Bonnie Jo Dopp.

But now we begin honoring the few dozen good folks who have contributed so much to this congregation for over 25 years each. Paul and Diane will take turns reading names.

HONOREES:

Joann Alexander	Robert Holloway	Esther Nichols*
Betty Allen	Peter Hurley	Lowell & Marge Owens
Mary Carson	Kenneth Jenkins	Marilyn Pearl
Bill & June Clarke	Dora Kennedy*	Bernard & Sandra Peavey
Mid Cutchis	Diana & Michael King	Benjamin Peery*
Jan & Neil Davidson	Edward Kobee	Sandra Roberts
Ed Dawson	David Lange	Marysol Scott
Marjory & Bertram* Donn	Larry* & Ruth Lates	Erika Teal
Anne Etkin*	Rene & Frank McDonald	Fred Teal
Nancy Etkin	Sherry Mitchell	Pat & Charles Tompkins
Deni Foster	Andrew Myrup &	David & Jane Trout
Marie & Jack Gore	Elizabeth Yanowitch	Meg Waugh*
David Haberman*	Clarence “Jince” Newell*	Forest & Agnes Williams
Eileen Haines	(Charter)	(Charter)
Kathy & Kevin Hackett		Bettie Young

*Also received our PBUUC “Doctor of Durability” degree for surpassing the 80 year marker

Special 25+ Year Tribute by John Bartoli:

I must say I am quite honored to participate today in what will probably go down in church history as the longest chalice lighting ever...25 years...25 plus years connected with this congregation... let me see, that's 300 months...9,125 days...219,000 hours...13,140,000 minutes...788,400,000 seconds...

But let's look at this from a Unitarian Universalist point of view...25 years is about 1,300 percolating urns making about 65,000 cups of after Sunday service coffee...and that's not counting the hot water for the tea and decaf...that would also be about 300 or so Board meetings consuming some 6,750 person hours of work to utter exhaustion... it's about 750 choir rehearsals, though if you ask the choir, they probably think it's more like a thousand...it's 900 Sundays of Religious Education representing about 4,500 classes with some 9,000 person hours of teaching...(all those hours of non-doctrination and those darn kids still have a mind of their own...but I guess that's the point, isn't it?)

It's a minimum of 25 congregational meetings, but probably more like 75, when you take into account all the special circumstances that always seem to come up in the life of this church...to build or not to build, to call new ministers or not to call them, to borrow or not to borrow, to grow or not to grow, to Montessori or not to Montessori, to fix the leaking steeple, to rebuild the burned out RE building, and so on and on and on...

25 years...if you've been here that long, it may seem like the blink of an eye, (or, to be more accurate, about 28,875,000 blinks of the eye)...So, what does 25 plus years of connection to Paint Branch mean? Well, if you look down the list of the honorees today, you'll find what it means...there are at least 17 people who have served on our Board of Trustees, as trustee or Treasurer or Secretary...seven of these people have chaired the Board...some of them more than once...There are

many RE teachers including at least 2 Directors of Religious Education... In addition to the many members of the choir past and present, there is also a former Music Director... There are also many members of many different Committees and, of course, at least 1 Ethnic Dinner Maker...

Now I'm not a numbers person but the number 25 has some interesting mathematical qualities... first, it is the smallest square that is also the sum of 2 other squares... 3 squared plus 4 squared equals 5 squared or 25... whoop de do, right? Well... it's also the atomic number of Manganese and the number worn by both Mark McGwire and Barry Bonds...

Still not impressed? OK how about this... the number 25 is an automorphic number... *automorphic*... when you square this number, the resultant product ends in itself... 25 squared is 625... 6... 25... get it? And if you keep squaring it, or even just keep multiplying it by 25, you'll end up with the last two digits always being 25... *automorphic*... it recreates itself... what a wonderful word to describe our church and especially the people we honor today...

25 years... that's longevity... that's commitment... (after that many years you couldn't get out of here if you tried)... and like the mathematical oddity that the number 25 is, it is *automorphic*... Paint Branch recreates itself over and over through the years... with people who are always ready to commit their time, ideas, and money towards a greater goal... (and ready to discuss it with you until you drop from exhaustion)... that's why we're here to honor you all... without you, without your footsteps, without your meetings and planning and sacrifice and vision and hard work, we would not be here ready to recreate ourselves once more... so as I again light the Flaming Chalice this morning, let us *automorph* ourselves together into the future community we are always becoming...

HOMILY *Stepping Forth, Then and Now* — Jaco ten Hove

One of the calling cards of this congregation throughout 5+ decades has been its friendliness, what is often called hospitality. As Unitarian Universalist Association president Bill Sinkford has reminded us:

*(W)hile the practice of hospitality is indeed about welcoming the stranger,
at a deeper spiritual level hospitality is really about
cultivating openness in ourselves.*

Have you ever conceived of hospitality as a spiritual discipline? It may well be that stepping forth into this next era of PB will require that we indeed deepen this aspect of our congregation's posture. I believe we can cultivate more openness in ourselves, which will in turn deepen our collective spiritual practice of hospitality to the stranger.

How many of you once arrived here as strangers and were welcomed in? Probably all of us—except you home-bred Paint Branchers whose parents thankfully didn't give you a choice.

A much harder question to answer is this: How many visitors and guests never stuck around because they didn't connect, didn't find the hospitality compelling enough to bring them back? It is rather curious that despite our deserved reputation for friendliness, Paint Branch has not grown in net membership numbers for about 30 years.

Enough new members have joined to replace lost ones, numerically (“automorphically”), but barely so, year after year. The same can be said for Unitarian Universalism as a whole, so maybe we are just reflective of a national trend, which, given the large overall increase in population, has us dropping in relative size, year after year.

Some pessimists suggest we are likely to evaporate in the coming decades. (It can take a long time for an institution to actually die, they say.) Some right wing religionists dismiss

us with a similar disdain, happily assuming that we are fading into the sunset since we have so obviously failed to garner any real growth in numbers and the corresponding ability to influence larger cultural discussions.

Others among us, myself included, are convinced that this need not be the scenario of the 21st century; that we mustn't cede the moral and religious landscape to the more vocal orthodoxy, which, we believe, do not really represent great numbers, either, even though they splash around a lot and have some gigantic congregations and lots of media presence.

There is a huge middle ground, occupied by many, many Americans who are not inclined toward orthodoxy, but who do not even know our brand of liberal religion exists! We have, in recent decades, been very effective at hiding our liberal light under a bushel, as it were, so it is perhaps not surprising that they have not found us.

It has not always been that way in this metro area, however. Almost exactly 50 years ago, the pre-eminent Unitarian leader of his day and very active minister at our All Souls Church in the District, A. Powell Davies died suddenly. Over the 13 years of his ministry there, he very intentionally launched a growth spurt that helped position our region as the largest concentration of UUs anywhere outside the Boston area.

In fact, those in the founding generation of this congregation eagerly recall that some of their motivating inspirations were the stirring sermons of A. Powell Davies, week after week for a few years, piped in live by telephone wire to emerge from a speaker in their rented classroom at the University of Maryland. Davies was an ex officio member of the first board of trustees of this church, as he was for numerous other new congregational starts from 1948 to 57. He helped our founders and their local peers step forth boldly into a new era of thriving congregational life.

Powell Davies was an articulate and forceful voice for liberal religion, and as I've come to learn of his work, I'm inspired anew. Much of his material is still timely, perhaps even

more so. His leading effort at “Unitarian Advance” was based on what he called “the growing substance of a liberal faith,” which he expounded upon with regularity.

A powerful collection of his writings is called “America’s Real Religion,” which is what he called Unitarianism, and he defended this outrageous proposition quite ably. Here’s one short quote:

America’s real religion is the world’s real religion: the only religion that can save us and heal our dissensions. For the faith upon which democracy is based is the victory of truth over superstition, of liberty over servitude, of the universal over the provincial, of love over fear.

His influence extended to the White House and the pages of the Washington Post, which was known to summarize his sermons in their Monday edition. His widow, Muriel Davies, not only lived on, but carried forth, helping to grow the merged Unitarian Universalism in this area from the 1960s on—so much so that she was honored last year on her 100th birthday by ordination as Minister Emerita at the River Road UU Congregation in Bethesda, which she helped start.

Powell Davies left a legacy of continued growth—for a while. But it has, indeed, dwindled in recent decades. Cynics again might suggest that this coincides with the aging of the baby boom, but why, some of us ask, should we settle for diminishing numbers and influence when our message can still “save us and heal our dissensions”?

Have we become so complacent that we care not for the wider connections that unite us in a broader campaign for “truth over superstition...love over fear”? This is, if anything, even more potent a call to us today. How well are we responding? The total number of members is certainly not the only, or maybe even the best indicator, perhaps, but many of us are convinced that we can shift the current lack of momentum from just replacing ourselves toward actually increasing our vibrant and vital movement to capture the hearts and minds of more Americans who are indeed out there and hungry for something like what we’re brewing.

In fact, given the state of our region, country and world, plus the rising ferocity of a fear-based, regressive religious orthodoxy, “now is (indeed) the time” for us to step forth with vigor and speak our truth, even if in our own authentic, idiosyncratic way.

Thus has our UU Association of Congregations—what we call the UUA—embarked on our first national media campaign since the 1950s (when the Unitarian Laymen’s League sponsored very effective ads that asked “Are you a Unitarian without knowing it?”

Our first foray into this 21st century realm is the full-page ad that came out in the Oct. 15 edition of Time Magazine, right opposite the first beginning of the “Life” section on page 63, and it asks another provocative question: “Is God keeping you from going to church?”

I think this is a pretty clever approach, which may appeal to a variety of seekers. The banner slogan that will, I believe, carry through multiple ads is “Nurture Your Spirit. Help Heal Our World”—which strikes a nice balance. There will be more ads coming in Time, four altogether before the end of the calendar year. The next one will make this suggestion: “Find us and ye shall seek,” which honors our open willingness to be on a journey together, without creed or dogma.

The UUA has also been quite pointed in reminding us that this campaign could very well increase the number of strangers walking through our doors on Sunday mornings. And so, we had better hone our spiritual discipline of hospitality, to be ready to receive and encourage and draw in more newcomers. I invite you to consider what this would look like, both personally and institutionally.

Which brings me to yesterday, and the large event held at All Souls Church to honor A. Powell Davies and his legacy of encouraging the growth of our movement. This was a regional gathering of our larger institution, drawing people from all 27 congregations in the Baltimore/Washington region. About 20 Paint Branchers attended, half of them

singing in the huge massed choir, which sounded magnificent! There were over 400 people all told and it was a stirring event, with four excellent preachers from this area giving short but rousing homilies.

Retired minister Bill Murry (now from Annapolis) reminded us that “The work of the church is to change the world.” And relatively new minister Nancy McDonald Ladd (serving in Manassas, VA) challenged us by suggesting, “We are called to grow not just in numbers *but in courage.*”

It was a marvelous and inspiring afternoon. One of the less obvious elements but equally inspiring, to me at least, was that this service was broadcast outward, not over telephone lines, per se, but as a live webcast. This was a juicy technological parallel to how the voice of A. Powell Davies was transmitted out to fledgling congregations more than 50 years earlier.

Some of the courage now required of us will be to prioritize our resources to support a stronger media presence, which is expensive, to be sure. The upcoming two-page “advertorial” spread in Time Magazine is not cheap. Later this month we will begin sponsoring a new section on Time’s web site called Religion Pages. Congregations in various metro areas are collaborating on local ad campaigns. A new 12 minute, very well produced DVD about UUism is available off the uua.org website and has been sent to all churches.

We may well benefit from such efforts and we can help participate in their funding. Meanwhile, in the weeks ahead, and always, keep an eye out for new faces among us and practice your own spiritual discipline of hospitality, as we open ourselves to greater diversity AND numbers, too.

The liberal churchman and activist for peace and civil rights, William Sloane Coffin, gets a lot of credit for this powerful sentiment: "The world is now too dangerous for anything but the truth, and too small for anything but love." This is, however, almost word for

word what Powell Davies said some years earlier, as recognized by no less than President Ronald Reagan, who quoted him correctly during a 1981 White House message:

Let us also work this week to extend the hand of brotherhood to all the peoples and nations of the world. "The world is now too dangerous for anything but the truth," the Reverend A. Powell Davies once said, "and too small for anything but brotherhood."

[<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=43416>]

Either way, this is a true statement, one that *both* uplifts *and* challenges us to do our part, to BE a part of stepping forth into the uncertain and often unsettling future with courage and creativity. I encourage *both* your continuing support of this congregation, which embodies our values in the local community, *and* your significant participation in the collective efforts of our Association, which embodies our values in the wider world.

For the sentiment that suggests “We Would be One” is indeed a courageous one, as expressed in the early 1950s by my colleague Sam Wright in our Hymn #318. He wrote these words as the Unitarian and Universalist youth organizations were merging, almost a decade ahead of the two adult denominations. Let us sing with gusto, to the familiar and beautiful tune Finlandia, Hymn #318, We Would Be One...

CLOSING WORDS —

Now *is* the time, my friends, to honor our past, our present and our future by stepping forth boldly as our forebears did. Let us learn anew to love, which is “the lesson and legacy we know... Now is the time for vision and courage” and the spiritual disciple of hospitality, which helps us cultivate openness in ourselves.

“The work of the church is to change the world,” so let us strive toward the good and build for tomorrow a nobler world than we have known today, drawing ever more deeply on the Spirit of Life as our companion and guide.

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