

“A Sanctuary for the Spirit”
Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Opening Service in New Sanctuary (“Move-in Sunday”)
February 7, 2010
Rev. Bruce Bode

Lighting the Chalice (in unison)

We are travelers. We meet for a moment in this sacred place to love, to share, to serve. Let us use compassion, curiosity, reverence, and respect while seeking our truths. In this way we will support a just and joyful community, and this moment shall endure. (QUUF Covenant Statement)

Opening Words & Musical Response

At this final Sunday service in this lovely place,
Let us begin by counting our many, many blessings.
Let us be grateful for the incredible gift of life,
And for the capacity to see, to feel, to hear, and to understand.
Let us be grateful for this time of fellowship, for work to do, and for service to render.

And let us then be especially grateful for the ties of love which bind us together, giving dignity, meaning, worth, and joy to all our days.

Our Memories of This Place

Before we make our short pilgrimage from this place into our new building, we would like to express parting words of gratitude and praise to this room that has meant so much to us, as well as to dedicate it to a new purpose.

Every change, of course, partakes of a mixture of emotions, and I suspect that would certainly be the case today.

Aware of the changes in store for our Fellowship this month, the facilitators of our Covenant Groups choose the topic, “Dealing with Change,” as one of this month’s two topics. One of the quotations that will accompany that Covenant Group agenda is this one:

All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another. (Anatole France)

So before we make our journey into our new building, we would like to bring to mind some memories of this place. We would like to have been able to pass the microphone around and give everyone a chance to share memories of this sanctuary, but that is the part of the change we are undergoing – a change in scale. Such a thing could take the entire service.

So in place of everyone having a chance to share their memories verbally, I will read a few memories that you have written down and placed in the Box of Memories. All of these memories will be made into a Book of Memories by Karen Page and placed in our Archives.

A Litany of Gratitude upon Leaving Our Sanctuary

INTRODUCTION (spoken by minister): This is a room that short years ago we built as a sacred place, a haven in which to harbor our dreams of a just and caring community. Now, as we prepare to leave this sanctuary, we would offer departing words of thanks and praise.

MINISTER: In this place we have gathered weekly to reflect, to ponder, to wonder, to give thanks, to sing, to meditate, to pray, to praise, to prepare ourselves for the week ahead.

CONGREGATION: For being a place in which we have met to consider and celebrate the core meanings, values, and convictions by which we live; we offer our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: In this place we have told stories to our children and shared with them our ideals and values, then blessed them on their way.

CONGREGATION: For being a place in which our children could be cared for and loved, we offer our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: In this place we have held ceremonies marking the stages of our lives. Here we have blessed the birth of our children and recognized their coming-of-age, celebrated unions of marriage and partnership, and spoken our final goodbyes at the time of death.

CONGREGATION: For being a place in which we could carry out rites of passage, we offer our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: In this place we have attended to the circle of seasons in nature about us and the corresponding rhythms of spirit within us. Here we have commemorated Old Year and New Year, Good Friday and Easter, Earth Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah and Christmas.

CONGREGATION: For being a place in which to observe and celebrate holidays and holy days, we offer our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: In this place we have honored the arts, taught the sciences, challenged the intellect, and tuned the body.

CONGREGATION: For being a place in which we could exhibit paintings, display banners, attend classes, enjoy concerts, and enact plays; we offer our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: In this place we have extended ourselves to the larger community and world. Here we have affirmed and promoted justice, equity, and compassion in human relations; here we have sought to preserve the earth and her many forms of life.

CONGREGATION: For being a place in which we could express our generosity, provide service, and strive toward greater harmony; we offer our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: This place has cradled our visions, swelled with our songs, rung with our laughter, and held

our sorrow. These walls have been a container for our highest hopes and deepest dreams.

CONGREGATION: For being a haven for our hopes and a witness to our dreams, we offer our thanks and praise.

Hymn – “Spirit of Life”

Perhaps the most sung hymn in this place has been “Spirit of Life.” Before we leave, let’s sing it one more time.

Welcoming of New Piano for Our Fellowship Hall

Even though there are things we may miss about holding services in this space on Sunday mornings, it’s not as if this space is disappearing from our lives. Indeed, this space will take on new purposes, perhaps some that we cannot yet envision.

And, actually, we are already preparing for those new purposes. For example, in place of the nine-foot Steinway grand piano, which is more suited to the larger space of our new sanctuary, this morning we have a piano whose size is more suited for this space. It’s a Baldwin “parlor grand” piano constructed in 1957, and it’s five-feet, eight inches in length.

This piano, which arrived just this past Thursday, has been generously gifted to us by Karl and Linda Bach in memory of Karl’s mother, Margaret Ruth Avedovech Bach. Karl felt that his mother would like to see this piano used by a community of people. Thank you, Karl and Linda, for your very generous gift.

Also, works of art may continue to grace this Hall, as they do today. The whimsical figures you see around the room here are the works of Megan and Esko Cate. I would have you note a new piece that was hung just this week. It was constructed out of materials from the work site here, and the lettering on it reads, “Wallyworks,” the name of Malcolm Dorn’s construction company, our builder.

Dedication of Fellowship Hall

Before we take our leave of this place, let us dedicate it to a new purpose. In moving to a new sanctuary, we ask that this, our original sanctuary, fulfill a new role, that of being our Fellowship Hall.

Would you please stand now, as you are able, and join me in words of dedication of our new Fellowship Hall.

DEDICATION (spoken in unison): Grateful for all we have experienced in this sacred place, we now dedicate it to new purposes. We dedicate this room to social, artistic, educational, and recreational purposes – to coffee and community, lectures and laughter, music and merry-making. May this room be enjoyed by members and friends, guests and visitors, serving children and adults alike. May friendship and fellowship flower abundantly in this Fellowship Hall.

Procession to New Sanctuary

Entering Song – “Enter, Rejoice, and Come In”

Placement of Chalice in New Sanctuary – Betty Oppenheimer, Board President

A Litany of Intention upon Entering Our New Sanctuary

INTRODUCTION (spoken by minister): In this room that has been built by our love and labor, we would speak of our vision and intentions for this place:

NORTH: May this sanctuary be a place of welcome, open and inviting to all who seek to deepen the life of the spirit.

SOUTH: May this sanctuary be a place of worship, where we awake to wonder, and in which we lift up our hearts in words of gratitude and songs of praise.

NORTH: May this sanctuary be a place of deep quiet, where we come to restore our souls, and in which we gather to seek the stillness.

SOUTH: May this sanctuary be a place of loving care, where we attend to the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social well-being of our members and friends; and in which we mark and celebrate the stages of a human life.

NORTH: May this sanctuary be a place of instruction, in which we bless and support our children, and pass on to them the values and convictions of our religious heritage.

SOUTH: May this sanctuary be a place of thought, providing a safe structure and nourishing context in which we may, individually and together, address life’s largest questions and discern and refine our world-and-life views.

NORTH: May this be a place of emotion, in which laughter and joy abound, where sadness and sorrow are embraced.

SOUTH: May this sanctuary be a place of beauty, a building that itself expresses the glory of creation, and one in which we may creatively express ourselves.

NORTH: May this sanctuary be a place of exploration, in which our members and friends, from childhood to older age, are offered a wide variety of educational, musical, artistic, social, and recreational opportunities for the enrichment of their lives.

SOUTH: May this sanctuary be a place of social involvement, in which we reach out to the local community and world to engage and support its social, ethical, environmental, artistic, and spiritual endeavors and concerns.

NORTH: May this sanctuary be a place of environmental responsibility, in which we deepen our sense of connection to the Earth, and seek to tread lightly upon it and promote sustainability.

SOUTH: May this sanctuary be a place of community connection, in which ties may be strengthened

and deepened between members and friends of this Fellowship, other Unitarian Universalist congregations, and the interfaith community.

ALL: Grateful for the privilege and opportunity to be part of this religious community, with humility we enter this sacred place.

“A SANCTUARY FOR THE SPIRIT”

Introduction

At this opening service in our new sanctuary, I'd like to talk for a few minutes – not too long – about my understanding of the meaning and value of a sanctuary, about the concept of sacred space, and about how we might be together in this space.

So here we are in this new place that we have looked forward to and labored at for months and years. We've built it ... mostly ... still some work to be done, but mostly we've built it, and here we are.

We've spent an enormous amount of time, money, and physical, mental, and emotional energy in planning and constructing this place.

Too much, it could be argued. With all the needs of our world, which only seem to escalate with time, why put so much time, effort, and resources into building a space like this that in some ways is not entirely practical? You don't need a ceiling this high to shelter us from the rain, wind, weather. You don't need timbers this massive to build a room to hold two hundred or so people.

So why have we done it? Why have we built this place?

I suspect there may be a variety of individual reasons, but I'd like to talk about what I think is the essential underlying reason for building this space, a reason that may not even be that present in the consciousness of everyone, but a reason that has implications for how we are to be in this space.

What we have built here, in my understanding, is a *sanctuary* – not a meeting hall, not an auditorium, not a performance center; what we've built is a sanctuary; we've built a soaring, splendid sanctuary.

This sanctuary will serve other functions as well. It will function as a multi-purpose space. We spoke of many of those functions in our opening litany of intentions. But this place has been built, first of all and primarily, as a sanctuary, as sacred space, as space that is marked off from everyday space.

Why a sanctuary?

What is a sanctuary? What is sacred space? Why do we need it? What does it say about us humans?

The need for sanctuary space may be laid deep within us. The need to find or create a space that cuts us off from our everyday world in order to relate us to a different level of life and being is a need that goes way back in human history, and is, I think, at the core of what is most distinctive and defining of our species.

Our most prominent Unitarian Universalist theologian, Forrest Church, who died just this past September, characterizes us humans as the “religious animal” – not first of all the “tool-making animal,” not the “animal with advanced language” but the “religious animal” ... because we are the ones who “are driven to explore the mysterious ground of our own being.”

Says Forrest Church, “We may not be the only creatures who know they are going to die, but I wager we are the only ones who wonder why we live.” (Bringing God Home, p. 195)

It is out of the drive to contemplate and connect to the depth and mystery of our own being and of being itself that we seek places of sanctuary. The sanctuaries of our world are built by us humans not only as monuments to the depth and mystery of being but also as places where we might touch and taste and feel that depth and mystery.

Temple sanctuaries

Joseph Campbell, that great scholar of mythology and world religions, writes about this need for sanctuary space in relation to the ancient, underground paintings that have been discovered in various caves in France and Spain, some of these paintings dating back 20,000 years or more. I’m sure many of you have seen photographs of these impressive cave paintings – gorgeous renderings of animals of the hunt and also mysterious, unknown creatures that are in the mix as well.

Campbell refers to these caves as “Temple Caves” or “Sanctuaries.” They had no practical purpose. Their purpose, he says, was not magic, which can and must be done quickly: draw an animal in the sand and quickly dispatch it a rite of magic killing.

No, says Campbell, the purpose of these “Temple Caves” was to create a sanctuary that connected one to a different dimension of reality than our everyday reality – call it the “eternal dimension” – a dimension that is outside of time ... beyond time, before time, other than time ... other than the time-bound aspect of our active, calculating minds.

To reach these caves can be very arduous. In one of these caves, for example, you have to crawl on your belly about forty yards through a passage so small that at times you actually have to put your face flat on the ground in order to make your way through. In his marvelous book, The Way of the Animal Powers, Campbell writes:

These great painted grottoes, chill, dangerous, labyrinthine, wherein all orientation to the quarters of the sky is lost, and time stops – or rather, continues without punctuation of day and night – were never dwelling places, but temples beyond the tick of time....

Their herds are the herds, not of time, but of eternity, out of which the animals of the light-world come, and back to which they return for renewal. Some of the bulls in the animal frieze of the Lascaux Rotunda are more than 17 feet long, rendered with a fluency and grace of line, as alive as life itself....

No crude anthropological theory of “primitive magic” suffices to explain its extraordinary beauty, the aesthetics of its organization, or the magnificence of its forms.

(The Way of the Animal Powers, pp. 63-64)

A red ring

And Campbell, in his study of religion and mythology world-wide, also speaks of another example that, though quite different, takes us to the same place.

In India, he had noted the custom of people drawing a red ring around an object. It might be any object, any object that might have attracted one's attention: perhaps an unusual stone or tree, maybe a flower, a child, a cow. In India, symbolically speaking, all cows have red circles drawn around them.

What's behind this practice?

The idea of drawing a red circle around an object is to change your orientation to it so that you behold the object not in its everyday, practical dimension, not in its instrumental dimension and how it may serve you; rather, you draw a circle around an object so that you can behold it, borrowing a word from the East, in its "suchness," in its "isness." You simply stand before it in amazement, seeing it as an expression of the wonder of being. You stand before it like Moses before the burning bush in the desert, seeing the flame of eternity leaping from it.

To draw a red ring around an object is to make a small shrine. You enter, as it were, into a sanctuary space. And it is a place where you might well build a sanctuary.

The essential reason for building a sanctuary

This is what I am suggesting is the essential reason why we build a sanctuary: It is to acquaint and re-acquaint ourselves with the "suchness" of being – the wonder that anything is, the wonder that we are. We create a place to temporarily cut ourselves off from the practical, everyday world in order "to explore the mysterious ground of our own being."

Now, don't worry, when you return from sacred space, your everyday world will still be here. But, hopefully, when you do return, that everyday world will shine a bit more ... for the idea of cutting yourself off for a time is to return with new vision – to be able to see the wholeness and holiness in every particle of being, every particle of our everyday world.

The greatest spiritual teachers have always said that the wholeness and holiness of being is always with us ... it's not a long distance away ... nor is it a long time from the present. It's simply a matter of perception ... it's simply a matter of opening the eyes. Eternity surrounds and fills us every moment ... if only we awake.

So the first purpose of creating a sanctuary and coming to a sanctuary is to remind us of the wholeness and holiness of being – to remind us of the "suchness" of ourselves and all things.

In doing this I believe we perform a function for being itself ... for we humans are an example of the power of Being becoming aware of itself; or, in more traditional language, we are God coming to self-awareness.

Why a communal sanctuary?

But one might ask, “Why do we need a *communal* sanctuary? Why not simply have a sanctuary space in one’s own home?”

“Good,” I answer. I recommend it. One should have a sanctuary for the spirit in one’s home. One should have a corner of a room, or an entire room, to which one can repair ... a place where nothing can get at you, a contained area where you can seek the stillness.

But I would contend that the need for *communal* sanctuary space is also important. It meets a deep human need to have a place and to be in a place where *together* we recognize and praise the depth and mystery of life and being.

A place set apart

One of the things I have looked forward to most in the building of a new sanctuary is the separation of sanctuary space from social space. I’ve said that a number of times.

I have loved the human warmth that I found in our original sanctuary. That’s what I wrote about as my memory: a quilt of human warmth that I found there.

And, certainly, I don’t want to lose that quality of warmth and humor and human closeness in this space. But what I have often longed for is a place of sanctuary where one could cut off and hunker down.

So I’d like to point us in that direction this morning. And we can work this out together as we go forward. But here’s what I and the staff and others have been talking about in terms of making a separation between “sanctuary space” and “social space.”

We’d like to keep the sanctuary doors – when they are hung – closed until about five minutes before our services. At the same time, individuals, if they want to come in before that time to find a seat, or to be by themselves, or to light a candle in our new candleholders; they could do so through any of the doors.

Meanwhile, those who want to socialize and have a cup of coffee can be in our newly-designated Fellowship Hall. Then, at about five minutes before the service is to begin, someone will come into the Fellowship Hall with a pleasant sounding bell or some other musical instrument to indicate that services are about to begin. At the same time, the main sanctuary doors will be opened by our ushers.

Also, we’d like to ask that food and drink be consumed in the Fellowship Hall and not brought into the sanctuary. And if you need water, please have it capped. This is not being requested simply for the reason of keeping things nice in here. More than that: it’s a reminder that when you enter here, you are entering a different space, seeking a different trajectory, seeking an inward center.

Also, in this regard, let me say a word about how you may consider entering this building. I’d like to suggest that you think of making a little “pilgrimage of preparation” as you come here from wherever you have parked your car, or you bike, or have walked. This is what the grounds have been designed for: to lead you on a little pathway as you enter ... so that you take the little extra time to follow the path to the main entrance into our foyer.

As I say, we will work out all of this together as we go along. But this morning, in this our first service, I'm calling upon us to reflect upon what we have built here, and why we have built it.

A moment of reflection

And one other thing I'd like to try as an experiment, beginning right now. After the morning's message, which is now concluding, I'd like to have a brief piano interlude where we take a little time to reflect on the message and to make a transition to the concluding part of our service. Then, after a half a minute or so or reflection, our pianist will begin playing the introduction to the closing hymn, and then, at a signal from our choir director or song leader, we will rise for the closing hymn and parting benediction.

Ikue, would you please play a little music to accompany our meditations.

Spoken Benediction

We clasp the hands of those that go before us,
And the hands of those who come after us.
We enter the little circle of each other's arms
And the larger circle of lovers,
Whose hands are joined in a dance.
And the larger circle of all creatures,
Passing in and out of life,
Who move also in a dance,
To a music so subtle and vast that no ear hears it
Except in fragments.

(Wendell Berry, excerpt from "Healing," What Are People For?)

Extinguishing of Chalice

We extinguish this flame,
But not the light of truth,
The warmth of community,
Or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts
Until we are together again.

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of the service by The Reverend Bruce A. Bode at the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on the occasion of moving into a new sanctuary on February 7, 2010. The spoken service, available by contacting the Fellowship, may differ slightly in phrasing and detail from this manuscript version.)