

275th Anniversary Service
First Unitarian Universalist Church
Harvard, MA
7 June 2009

Players:

Opening words: Betsy Williams
Male congregant: Tom Aciukewicz
Female congregant: Kirsti Gamage, Kristine Tomlinson
Minister: Bob Eiland, Reverend Wendy Bell
Youth: Nellie Agosta, Hannah Keaney
Drummer: Harry Green, Line singer: Donnalisa Johnson

Crew:

Lights: Colleen Pierce
Slides: Jeff Levering

Videographer: Jonathan Williams

Playwright: Betsy Hill Williams

Set photos: Our Church Buildings_275th Anniv_Service_set.ppt

Researchers: Milly Chandler, Jeff Harris, Kirsti Gamage (facilitator), Kristine Tomlinson, Betsy Williams.

The Service

Procession of the Deacons

Announcements

Opening Words

Two hundred seventy-five years. Fourteen generations. Five buildings. Four names. This spot on earth, chosen nearly three centuries ago by a vote of pebbles—this spot has been our religious home. Ours is a living tradition. The first people to worship on this site probably wouldn't recognize themselves in us today. Or would they? What does it mean to be part of a "living" tradition? What changes? What endures?

This morning we invite you on a journey to explore these questions. We are going to visit each building that has been on this site and hear the voices of ministers, congregation members and youth who, like us, made and found community here. What do you hear? Do you recognize yourself in these voices? What has changed? What has endured?

Music: *Psalm 124*. St. Anne's



Scene 1. First Building 1733-1773 (~43 years)

MALE CONGREGANT

Finally it was decided. Lancaster is just too far for us to travel every Sunday for worship gatherings, so we petitioned the Lancaster proprietors to grant a parcel of common land for the building of our own meeting house in Harvard. But still the question of where to erect our new meeting house vexed us all. It was decided to follow the ancient Greek tradition of voting by stone ballot and on October 3rd, 1732 all assembled voters specified their preference for a building site by putting a pebble where they wished the corner stone to be. The largest heap of stones won the vote and so chose the location.

MINISTER (Reverend John Seccomb)

By a vote of the town meeting of April 26th, 1733, I was invited to be the first pastor of the Church of Christ (or Harvard's First Church). After some deliberation I did happily accept their offer, which included the cutting and sledding of my wood. Though the new meeting house is located in the geographic center of this township, there are but two or three dwellings within a mile of it and I find myself traveling two miles to the Still River Farm of Joseph Willard for my accommodations. Still, it was a joyous day, on October 10th, when both my ordination and the organization of the church were celebrated by townspeople and official guests. Good food and drink was not spared. But it was the

covenant of the townspeople that mattered most that day and, as a strict Calvinist I was pleased by its reading:

MALE CONGREGANT

In humble dependance on free Grace for divine assistance and acceptance, we do in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord freely Covenant and bind ourselves solemnly in the presence of God himself, his holy Angels and all his Servants here present to serve the God whose name is Jehovah, Father, son and holy ghost, the only true and living God; and avouch him this day to be our God, our Father, our Saviour, and our Leader, and receive him as our Portion for ever. ... We declare our serious belief of the Christian Religion as contained in the Sacred Scriptures, heartily resolving to conform our lives unto the Rules of that holy Religion therein contained, as long as we live in this world. ... conscientiously attending the publick Worship of God, the Sacraments of his new Testament, the Discipline of his Kingdom, and all his holy institutions, in communion with one another, and watchfully avoiding sinfull stumbling blocks, and contentions as becomes a People whome the Lord has bound up together in the bundle of life. At the same time we do also present our offspring with our selves to the Lord, purposing with his help to do our part in the methods of religious Education as he has required of us; counting it as our high favour that the Lord will accept of us and our Children with us, to be his People.

YOUNG PERSON

Mother and her friends can hardly stop talking about it! After just a brief time with us, Reverend Seccomb has built a lavish gambrel-roofed three-story mansion on the common for his new wife Mercy Williams. It is one of the most baronial looking residences in all the Commonwealth! He has a farm of over one hundred and thirty acres that keep the granary, woodpile, cellar and larder well supplied. They say the fireplace is so large that the cook can walk into it almost without stooping and look up to the stars through the chimney shaft. The house is often filled with gay guests from the Bay towns. And when he seeks rest from such genial hospitality, Reverend Seccomb retreats to the substantial summer cottage he built on Grape Island on Bare Hill Pond, having been given said land by the Lancaster proprietors. How the gossip flies about the furnishings, and daily life, the doings, comings and goings at the palatial parsonage.

MINISTER

Some ten years into my ministry here I'm pleased to report a visible alteration for the better among the people I serve, as they, in their own way, have been swept up in the Great Awakening in New England. The traveling minister, Reverend George Whitefield, came through the area not long ago and no doubt stirred some among us to a new

religious fervor with his fiery evangelical brand of preaching. However, our revival is not characterized by violent or eccentric noisy demonstrations, nor by excessive emotion and outcry, as one hears about in other townships. Ours is a quiet revival; many are more thoughtful and serious, more constant and diligent in attending the public worship, more attentive in hearing the word preached, more careful to sanctify the Sabbath. Sleepy sinners have been awakened, stubborn sinners subdued, proud sinners humbled, and carnal persons made spiritual.

(Trinity Church, Rhode Island; showing a similar interior)

Music: *Hymn 497* Duke Street



Scene 2. Second Building 1775-1840 (~65 years)

CONGREGATION MEMBER For two years after the Reverend Seccomb left us, we were without a minister, then, in 1759 we called Joseph Wheeler of Concord to be our second minister. His tenure with us was short: he fell ill and was dismissed nine years later. But he went on to take an active role in the politics of the time: he was Harvard's representative in the first and third Provincial Congresses and the legislature of 1775. In the first Congress of 1774, he presented a letter in which it was suggested that while they were attempting to save themselves from slavery to a British ministry, they should "also take into consideration the state and circumstances of the negro Slaves in the Province." He marched in the Lexington alarm and later served as chaplain for George Washington in Cambridge.

Our third minister, Reverend Daniel Johnson, is a young man of great promise and magnetic address. His eloquence draws a great crowd every week and we now find ourselves in need of a new, larger building to house our assembly. Again we gathered stones and every voter lay a stone where he would like the new meeting house set. We are raising money for the new building by selling pews to the highest bidders. There's a great deal of excited discussion about how to seat the new meeting house, with such considerations as age, pay and service to our church all being important factors in how families are seated.

YOUNG PERSON

Ah, Sunday at last! As Josiah and I hastily dress, Mother adds burning embers to our footstools and father dons his powdered wig and paste shoe buckles—all in preparation for our journey, on foot of course, to our new meeting house on the common. Our pew is in the fifth seat below the pulpit and once settled in with our footstools under our feet to keep us warm, I can't see a thing! The sides of the new pews are so high that only the heads and shoulders of adults can be seen popping out of the tops. Still what a wonderful new meeting house we have! It's as big as any barn in town, with small porches at the front and two side entrances. The upper galleries along the sides and back are lit by a second row of windows, and the pulpit is raised high above the heads of everyone. I love seeing former deacons, Phineas Fairbank, Samuel Mead, Oliver Whitney, and Richard

Harris up front in their place of honor in the elders' seats. So awe-inspiring are these gentlemen, with their high-collared Sabbath-day coats. You'd never guess that they are farmers and mechanics like everyone else. Father says rare qualities are required for the making of a deacon and that good deacon "timber" can always be found in the Fairbank and Whitney families, and there has never been any lack of these in Harvard.

Finally, we arrive! Everyone is here! I must go quickly and find Abigail and Mary before the service begins. I have so much to tell them since I saw them last week. Even mother and father have scattered to greet friends. Whatever would we do without the Sabbath and the meeting house?

MINISTER

Change is in the air here in Harvard, as elsewhere in New England. Nearly five years passed with no minister in the pulpit after Reverend Johnson. During this time the Baptists organized a society in Still River and the Harvard congregation was weakened by loss of members to both this society and a new meeting house in neighboring Boxborough. In 1782, Ebenezer Grosvenor was called to the pulpit, a moderate Calvinist who some suspected of Arminian leanings; that is to say Christians who believe that all who believe in the sacrifice and lordship of Jesus Christ are saved by God's grace, not just those who are favored by God based on His own purposes. Grosvenor's successor, William Emerson (father of the well-known Ralph Waldo Emerson), definitely favored Arminianism. And this wasn't the only new trend Emerson brought to Harvard. He loved the bass-viol and introduced it into services with much scowling and shrugging of shoulders among the elders. He also started Harvard's first library, which was private, known as the Social Library Club.

CONGREGATION MEMBER

In 1812 it seemed that politics was going to tear this community apart! Our minister, Mr. Stephen Bemis, who came to us after Emerson so abruptly left us for First Church Boston, was an ardent Federalist, and he used the pulpit to regularly denounce the administration for its "unrighteous war" against Great Britain. Numerous Republicans in our congregation were so indignant that services were regularly interrupted by shuffling their feet on the sanded floor or other disorderly conduct intended to make manifest their displeasure. But it was not the debate about war with Britain that is finally driving a wedge in our community. Rather it is theological debate. The great tolerance and respect for individual religious views and private judgments, which hitherto characterized this diverse community, has given way to greater concern about uniformity of belief and separation of matters of church and town. Liberal views have been gaining ground and finally now, in 1820, those bound to a stricter Calvinist faith have resolved to withdraw from our congregation and set up their own church. It appears that this split will divide us into two nearly equal parts.

MINISTER

Harvard's long string of ministers had held a wide variety of theological doctrines and until 1820 the congregation generally tolerated these differences and was able to reach agreement when a new minister was needed. That changed in 1820 when the town

refused, for the first time in its history, to appropriate money for the minister's salary. With this tie severed, the church had no means to raise money for a minister and it became necessary for the church to incorporate itself as a separate entity in order to do so. In this climate, the developing factionalism between the Calvinists and the Unitarians worsened. On January 1st, 1821 a small group of Calvinists called a meeting (apparently attended only by members of this one faction) at which it was decided to petition the General Court for a charter as an independent parish, with use of the meetinghouse and the ministerial fund. A week later, the Unitarian faction held its own meeting and voted that the Calvinist group did not represent true Congregationalism, was a minority of pew holders, and should not be granted control of the meetinghouse and ministerial fund. The General Court sided with the Unitarians. The Calvinists continued their pursuit of independence and secured a lot of land at the base of the Common to build their own church. For the Unitarian Society, Henry Thomas Blanchard became the first minister of the Unitarian Society. He later married Margaret Bromfield Blanchard, whose donation founded the first public school in Harvard.

YOUTH

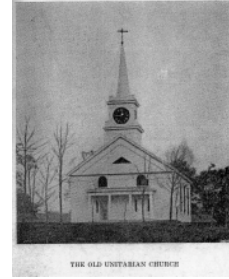
I'm sorry that Jane and I will not be going to meetings together anymore. Her family has joined the new Calvinistic Congregational Society and she will be attending meetings at the bottom of the hill when their new church is built. Father says it was inevitable—Harvard has grown so large and people want the business of the church, especially in matters of belief, to be separate from the business of the town. I think it's a good thing, even though it means we are a much smaller group than we used to be. And now we children get to have our own meetings! We call it Sunday School. Father says it's important for us to understand how Unitarians are different from Calvinists—I guess the Calvinists feel the same way because Jane tells me they have Sunday School, too. Sunday Schools used to be just for poor children who had to work during the week so they couldn't go to school. Some of Mother's friends think we should only be taught about religion by our parents, and some think it's scandalous that we are holding classes on the Sabbath because it's work, I guess. But I think it's fun. Our teacher uses books written by the Boston Unitarian Sunday School Society. The books I read are different from the ones the little kids use—it's like they understand we have different questions and can learn more because we're older. I like that. My teacher said she's trying to follow the advice of a famous Unitarian minister, William Ellery Channing, who said: "The great end in religious instruction...is not to stamp our minds irresistibly on the young, but to stir up their own." I like that, too. Stirring up my mind—regular school never does that!

MINISTER

In 1824 separation of church and state was complete. It was now voluntary to support the town church. You could support your local church, or a church of your choice, or no church at all. We hope that you will choose to support this church and its works in the larger community as we now gratefully receive the Offering. Please stand for the Offertory Hymn.

Music and Offertory: *Hymn 325*

Scene 3. Third Building 1840 – 1875 (~35 years)



CONGREGATION MEMBER

These are quiet years for Harvard and for our church, now known as the Unitarian Society. Religion is no longer such a strong force in people's lives and religious disputes no longer intrude on the town's business. The town population seems to be stagnant, if not actually declining. Where other towns are growing with modern farming practices, mills and manufacturing centers, Harvard's growth is limited by its hilly, rocky landscape, and inadequate water supply. In 1848, the Worcester and Nashua Railway came through Harvard, but we have yet to see much increased prosperity or changes other than closer contact with the outside world. I imagine that will come later.

The years have taken a terrible toll on the large building that housed the undivided parish of Harvard since the days of the Revolution. In 1840 it was too large for the congregation and in such disrepair that it was torn down and replaced by a neat wooden structure of more modest proportions. Sadly, this building served us for only 35 years; on Sunday, February 7th, 1875 it was destroyed by fire. During the service that day, everyone could smell smoke and the congregation had barely arrived home from services when the church bell called them back to the fire. Though slightly cracked and injured in tone, that bell was one of the few things to survive.

MINISTER

The American Unitarian Association was formed back in 1825 by Unitarian ministers committed to spreading our religion through missionary work and publications. One publication was a new hymnal in 1868. This hymnal was designed to improve the quality of congregational music and create a collection of denominational hymns. The collection represents the various tastes and tendencies of religious thought among us, including those regarding Christ as the Son of God. In this hymnal, as elsewhere, when opinions differ among us, the rule has been to be inclusive rather than exclusive. The book is intended to be used in times of joy and sadness.

A weekly AUA publication, *The Christian Register* has done much to bring to light and strengthen the diverse and ever-changing religious viewpoints of our ministers and congregations. I read you now an excerpt from the first volume, titled "Our Position as a Denomination":

We do not wonder that other denominations should be perplexed by the apparent discrepancies which they find among those who are called Unitarians. They have fixed and definite creeds to which all who join their churches, or at least those who officiate as clergymen among them, must assent. But we have no theological creed. Under this broad

canopy of freedom, there will of course be a very great variety of thought on theological subjects, and we can hardly mention a controverted subject on which there are not different shades of opinion among us.

We believe that no man yet has sounded the depths of God's truth, that his word is open to all, that whosoever will, may take of the water of life freely, and that with whatever help may be gained from the expositions of those who have gone before, each one is to search the scriptures for himself, and without reference to human creeds is to abide by and live in the truth which he finds there revealed to him.

YOUTH

I've just learned that brother Willis is to go to the Lawrence Academy in Groton next year, since our district school does not prepare students at a sufficiently advanced level to be admitted to any New England college. Mother of course wants him to stay home and find employment as a farmer in town, but father says this is not practical. He says Harvard land is not well suited for the new ways of farming and it's true that many small farms are turning their rocky land into dairy farms and orchards. Many of Willis' friends have already left to find work in other towns where laborers are needed for new manufacturing industries. As sorry as I am to see him go to Lawrence, I'm glad he isn't among those young men filling our town quota as soldiers in the new war between the states. When the war was officially announced, of course Harvard voted to take all necessary measures to support the federal government and Mr. Lincoln, including paying bounties to soldiers who volunteered for active duty. Our lives are so tranquil and uneventful here in Harvard; it is hard to fathom the horrors of war we hear about from our brave soldiers, like Sarah Sprague's brother. There will be great celebration when he returns home with the others. Perhaps Simeon Green who has been teaching dancing and social deportment to us boys and girls will hold a big dance in their honor. What fun we all have at his dances in the new town hall!

Music *Hymn 552 Old 124th with Amen.*

Scene 4. Fourth Building 1875 – 1964 (~89 years)

MALE CONGREGANT

After the fire that destroyed our meeting house, our Sabbath services were held in the town hall. Our minister, Rev. Goddard, devoted considerable energy and talent to re-building, and he was very influential in planning and pushing for our new building's completion. Our beautiful new building was dedicated in January 1876. The clock in its tower was a gift to the town from Warren Hapgood. Such philanthropy is common these days.



The death of Margaret Bromfield Blanchard in 1876 established the Bromfield Trustees, of whom our former minister Mr. Gilbert is a prominent member, and the subsequent establishment of the first public high school in Harvard, known as the Bromfield School. Mrs. Blanchard also left a considerable sum to the First Congregational Society for ongoing aid in support of a minister. Her bequest was followed by others; one notable sum was for the benefit of the Sunday School. The town as well as the church remain indebted to those who have given their gifts—and hence their names—to the educational, cultural, and religious institutions of our town—the Bromfield School, the Hapgood Room, and the Warner Free Lectures.

FEMALE CONGREGANT

In October 1893, twenty-two women of our congregation joined together to form the Ladies' Social Circle. Dues for membership were \$.25 a year. Our first social, which brought in \$.10 per adult, raised \$7.65, enough to purchase a curtain for the church. That was the beginning of a long tradition of dinners and socials every two weeks. Two of our most popular socials included a concert by Master Harry Atwood and reminiscences and readings of the recently deceased John Greenleaf Whittier. Our funds continue to support the salary of the minister, the organist, and the janitor.

In 1917, we met with Miss Bancroft, the president of the State Alliance of Unitarian Women who urged us to become a Branch Alliance. We voted to do this and to call ourselves the Ladies' Social Circle and Branch Alliance. Our stated goal is to “advance the interest of the First Congregational Unitarian Church in Harvard and to help defray expenses; to bring women of the denomination into closer cooperation and to devise ways and means for more efficient usefulness.” The advent of WWI gave plenty of means by which to feel useful. Many of us became involved with Red Cross activities.

We just completed our largest endeavor to date—the building of parish rooms at the back of the church. After 8 years of discussion and planning, the fully furnished rooms have finally become a reality and we held our first meeting in them on December 10, 1925. In addition to building the Alliance Rooms, other renovations took place, including welding the cracked 1860 bell, which had survived the fire of 1875. Now, we are in the process of planning our first public activity—a party for the choir!

MALE CONGREGANT

Women aren't the only ones organizing themselves these days. On the evening of October 11th, 1914 twenty-six men, all but one from the Unitarian Society, met in the Lower Town Hall and had dined together at 7 o'clock. The meal was followed by an address by the Reverend Samuel Nobbs of Marlboro who made reference to the formation of a Men's League to be affiliated with the National League of Unitarian Laymen. The League, later known as The Unitarian Men's Club, gathered on the first Sunday of the month until WWII.

In 1904, we officially changed our name to the First Congregational Unitarian Church of Harvard. One of the biggest changes for our congregation came with the advent of the

automobile. No longer restricted in distance by horse and buggy travel, our congregation is growing with the addition of people from surrounding towns. By the late-1930s the horse sheds were no longer in use, so they were torn down and replaced with a parking lot.

MINISTER (Rev. Roscoe E. Trueblood)

A series of ministers served Harvard at the turn of the century. The longest tenure was by one of our former Old Mill school district teachers, the Rev. Joseph Sheafe, who served us for fifteen years until 1910. In 1918 the congregation was invited to worship with the Congregational Church when the minister, Reverend Merrill, was granted a leave of absence to serve the YMCA's overseas war effort. The two congregations worshipped together for two years until his return.

I accepted the call here in October 1930 and was pleased to be part of the bicentennial celebration of both town and church in 1933. Sunday, October 29th, our celebration began with a service at 2:45 by the Reverend Charles Park of Boston who preached the sermon "The Task of the Church." He was assisted by the pastor of the Evangelical Church. I paid what I felt was a fitting tribute to those who upheld the church and ministers of these two centuries. Following the service, a social hour with refreshments was held in the Alliance Rooms, which afforded many happy reunions among old friends. Of former ministers only Rev. George Kent of Boston was present. A special feature was a birthday cake with two hundred pieces, one for each year, served by Mrs. Trueblood and Mrs. Arthur Bigelow. At 5:30 a candlelight service was held with a program of anthems and instrumental music. What a memorable event for the town and the church!

Here it is 1943 already and as I prepare to leave Harvard, I'm happy to report that the six years since the election of Frederic May Eliot as AUA president have brought a wave of reforms, including a call for a new Sunday School curriculum, which we hope will stem the decline in membership that many Unitarian congregations have witnessed this past decade. A dynamic new leader, Sophia Lyon Fahs, has been chosen for this religious education revival: She had this to say about what's to come in our Sunday School:

"To build the beginnings of faith in God on a conception of the universe that our generation no longer regards as true is to prepare the way for a loss of respect for the Bible; and what is worse, to court a cynical atheism when the child is old enough to learn for himself. We wish children to come to know God directly through original approaches of their own to the universe."

Publications called the "New Beacon Series" address children directly using vivid stories from around the world and draw on anthropological and psychological research. A modern faith, Mrs. Fahs argues, must take science and modern attitudes seriously; faith, she believes, is rooted ultimately in a person's own experiences.

YOUTH

I never thought Sunday School could be so much fun! My friends at the Congregational and Catholic churches are so jealous when I tell them about our experiments in nature and our visits to other churches to see for ourselves what worship is all about. I love the adventures of Martin and Judy, storybooks we read each week. My older sister is reading a book called “Beginnings of Earth and Sky”. Last week I got into a bit of trouble with my friend Barbara when we started talking about Sunday School. She said that Jesus was the son of God and I said, no, Jesus was a carpenter’s son because that’s the title of the book we just started reading. She didn’t like that idea.

FEMALE CONGREGANT

The war is finally over and our men have come home—eager for a normal life again and to heal the terrible wounds of war. Babies are everywhere and Harvard’s population is finally growing again! It is such a joy to welcome new members to our congregation and see our Sunday School swell with children of all ages. Our Couple’s Club, which started as a church committee, has become a vibrant part of our community, with the encouragement of Reverend Rudy Nemser, our new minister. In addition to fundraising for the church with events like our recent Minstrel Show, and the Apple Blossom Festival, we have revived the social gatherings of years past. We have great fun and have formed lasting relationships that extend well beyond the church walls.

Some of us with young children have even started a nursery school, under the watchful eye of Abigail Eliot, such a pioneer in the nursery school movement—and—a committed Unitarian! I fear the little Village Nursery School will soon outgrow its space in our Alliance Rooms. Our Sunday School is overcrowded too and there’s talk of creating a Fellowship Building across the street on land behind the parsonage. A new Fellowship Building. Now, wouldn’t *that* be something?

MALE CONGREGANT

With our Sunday School enrollment at 96 by 1957, it was clear that we needed more space. And, so after much conversation and financial planning, our Fellowship Building was finally completed in 1960. Around that same time we voted to join the newly merged association of Unitarians and Universalists.

Our church is developing a reputation in neighboring towns. Our excellent music program is often mentioned, especially our beautiful harpsichord made by our own Eric Hertz and encased by Walter Harrod. And more and more people seem to share the notion that Unitarian Universalism is a meaningful religion in contemporary society. Like the town itself, our church is a growing and vibrant community.

It was an auspicious beginning on December 12th, 1964 — only the second Sunday service for our new minister Carl Bretz—when shortly after Sunday services, we were called back to the common. A fire, started by faulty electric wires in the walls, had spread quickly throughout the building.



We salvaged what we could while frightened onlookers watched the steeple topple and the heavy steel bell crash to the ground, shooting sparks high into the sky. Sadly, our historic 18th-century pewter Communion service and records could not be saved. But, as our Board president Charles Sullivan told reporters after the fire:
The Bible tells of the necessary constituents for a church. We have the people and a roof over our heads [in the Fellowship Building]. We're in reasonably good shape."

Music *Hymn 1028 The Fire of Commitment*

Scene 5. Our Current Building 1966 (dedication date) – present (~33 years and counting)



CONGREGATION MEMBER

In the 1960s, turbulent times hit Harvard along with the rest of the nation. The war in Vietnam was divisive in both the town and in our church. Some felt we should join other churches and provide sanctuary for young men evading the draft. Others felt the need to keep church and state matters separate. A small group of church members left to start the Nashoba Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists, which met in members' homes. I'm sure this will be remembered as a difficult time for the congregation. But we endured and carried on the traditions started in an easier time: the ecumenical Christmas Pageant, the Apple Blossom festival, and the talent auction. Our religious education now extends to teenagers through two groups: Roundtable for junior high school students and Liberal Religious Youth or L-R-Y for high school students. Our new Fellowship Building is the scene of lively (and loud!) Friday night dances for LRY groups from surrounding towns.

I just heard that the churches in town are all getting together to bring a family from Cambodia to the United States. Several members of our congregation have offered to have teenagers or adults live with them while they attend school or seek jobs. It feels good to be doing something positive in response to the horrors of the war in Southeast Asia.

YOUTH

Last week at Roundtable, Claudia and Dave let us leave early because the Beatles were on Ed Sullivan and even though we *love* Roundtable, we couldn't miss that! It seems like everything my friends and I do these days has something to do with our church.

Roundtable, of course, is just for the kids in our church. I guess it's kind of like what my Catholic friends would call confirmation. We learn about Unitarian history and ideas but we also spend a lot of time learning about ourselves—including sex education—in *church*, can you believe it?! Me, I like the idea of advancing through the program from page to squire to knight. I don't know how many of us will get all the way through. It really challenges you to spend time alone and figure out what you believe about stuff.

This summer I'm going to be a counselor in the Harvard-Roxbury Summer Camp. Kids and teenagers from Roxbury come out and live with a bunch of families in Harvard and we all go to the Coolidge farm—and the pond of course—for different games and activities. I was a camper last year and it was really fun.

MINISTER

The late 1960s was indeed a turbulent time for the Harvard Unitarian Church. But the congregation was well cared for by Carl Bretz, and shortly after his departure a minister of rare stature—Malcolm Sutherland—agreed to “retire” from his position as Dean of the Meadville Lombard Theological School and fill our pulpit. The next 20 years were a time of great healing and growth in the congregation as both Malcolm and his wife Mary Anne went about the work of knitting us back together, helping us find common ground and to enjoy one another's company again. The Nashoba Fellowship dissolved and many of its members returned to the church. Malcolm traveled weekly to New York City to work at the World Conference for Peace and Justice. A Caring Committee was established so congregation members could provide the outreach to parishioners in need when Malcolm's schedule precluded him from doing so.

Malcolm drew many newcomers to the church with his masterful worship services, rich in intellectual ideas, and strong in simple ritual. He was an inspired speaker but also a great listener. Many considered him their closest counselor. Such a ministry was hard to follow and, as might have been expected, the church went through another turbulent time when he finally did retire and move to Maine.

Two periods of interim ministry, and one short ministry by the church's first female minister, Reverend Debra Mero, ended with the call of our current minister, the Reverend Wendy Bell, who also brings us the heart, intellectual vigor and inspiration so appreciated by our congregation. And, here she is to help us bring this part of our story to a close.

Closing Words

by Wendy Bell (with credit also to Betsy Hill Williams)

Two hundred seventy-five years. Fourteen generations. Five buildings. Four names.
A home for new religious ideas...
A sanctuary for our common worship...
A base for religious exploration and spiritual formation...
We are the inheritors of a great history, kept alive for us by countless others.

Rest here now, in this present moment. Take a deep breath. Look around. Feel yourselves to be part of this Beloved Community. Give thanks.

And know that each step you take, from this moment forward, is a step into the future
For we are not only the heirs of history,
 We are the stewards of history and the makers of history.

That which lies ahead is up to us.

 What future shall we envision together?

 Which path shall we choose?

 Which dreams shall we pursue?

How can we best honor those who came before us and be true to our collective selves?

How can we keep this tradition alive and thriving for those who will come after us?

 Some things will change.

 Others will endure.

Our challenge is to be the change we want to see;

 to practice both holding on and letting go.

Postlude *St. Anne's Reprise*

Sources

We extend our grateful thanks to the Boxborough Historical Society for supplying pictures of our first meeting house. The church building was sold to Boxborough in 1775 for use as their Town Hall. The building burnt down in 1953 after a long and varied use as the Town Hall, the Universalist Church, and the Town Library.

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