

Order of Service
Church of the Larger Fellowship
General Assembly 2007, Portland OR

Ingathering Music – led by Ms. Beth Norton, Director of Music, First Parish, Concord MA
“Yonder Come Day” – Georgia Sea Islands Chant
“We Give Thanks” – Wendy Luella Perkins

Introit – “For the Future” – Malcolm Dalglish

Opening Words – The Rev. Jane Rzepka, senior minister, CLF

Opening Hymn – “Gather the Spirit”

*Gather the spirit, harvest the power. Our separate fires will kindle one flame
Witness the mystery of this hour. Our trials in this light appear all the same.*

Chorus:

*Gather in peace, gather in thanks
Gather in sympathy now and then.
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.
Gather to celebrate once again.*

*Gather the spirit of heart and mind. Seeds for the sowing are laid in store.
Nurtured in love, and conscience refined, with body and spirit united once more.*

Chorus

*Gather the spirit growing in all, drawn by the moon and fed by the sun.
Winter to spring, and summer to fall, the chorus of life resounding as one.*

Chorus

Welcomes – Ms. Denny Davidoff, chair, CLF Board of Directors;
Ms. Kimberlee Tomczak, facilitator, Church of the *Younger* Fellowship Steering Committee

Meditation – Mr. Kelly Weisman Asprooth-Jackson and Mr. Barb Greve, intern ministers,
2006-07

Anthem – “Great Trees” words by Wendell Berry; music by Malcolm Dalglish

Responsive Reading - Mr. Dan Kane, CLF intern minister, 2007-08
Wendell Berry from *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

I go among trees and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
around me like circles on water.

My tasks lie in their places

*where I left them, asleep like cattle.
Then what is afraid of me comes
and lives a while in my sight.*

What it fears in me leaves me,
and the fear of me leaves it.

*It sings, and I hear its song.
Then what I am afraid of comes.
I live for a while in its sight.*

What I fear in it leaves it,
and the fear of it leaves me.
It sings, and I hear its song.

*After days of labor,
mute in my consternations,
I hear my song at last,
and I sing it. As we sing,
the day turns, the trees move.*

Music – “Where Do We Come From” – led by Mr. Matt Meyer

*Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?
Where do we come from?
Mystery, mystery, life is a riddle and a mystery.*

Reading – The Rev. Lynn Ungar, minister for lifespan learning, CLF

Response – “Return Again,” Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach

*Return again, return again, return to the home of your soul (2x)
Return to who you are. Return to what you are. Return to where you are
born and reborn again. (2x)*

Homily – The Rev. Patrick O’Neill, senior minister, First Unitarian Congregational Society,
Brooklyn NY

Anthem – “Shake These Bones” – Malcolm Dalglish

Homily – The Rev. Jane Rzepka

Closing Song – “This Little Light” – The Rev. Maddie Sifantus

Closing Words – The Rev. Jane Rzepka

Parting Music

Thank you for joining us in this morning’s worship service

The Church of the Larger Fellowship, Unitarian Universalist, is a church without walls serving isolated religious liberals. We create community with our parishioners through the mail, on the phone and on the Web and we support small congregations.

Please consider supporting the Church of the Larger Fellowship's work in the world by making a pledge on the card provided inside the CLF brochure on your seat.

Please give your pledge card to our ushers on the way out of the service.

Thanks to our musicians today:

**Beth Norton, Music Leader; Matt Meyer, percussion; Susan Peck, piano
Singers: Mimi Bornstein, Keith Arnold, Jason Shelton, Maddie Sifantus**

Thanks go as well to our ushers and service participants.

**Church of the Larger Fellowship
(CLF)
Worship Service
General Assembly
Oregon Convention Center
Portland, Oregon
June 24, 2007**

About the Service Music

Where possible, permission has been sought and granted to sing the copyrighted music used in this morning's service. Other songs are part of the oral tradition. We respectfully acknowledge the various peoples and cultures that have passed these songs on that we may sing them today. Many hands and voices have shaped these songs over time, and we are grateful for them all.

Yonder Come Day is based on a "Watch Night" chant from the Georgia Sea Islands, a stronghold of traditional African culture in the United States due to unique circumstance during and after the American slavery era. It is chanted during the New Year's Eve Watch Night gathering while the community waits for the New Year to dawn. Originally a somber vigil for the slave community, Watch Night became a celebration of the freedom that came at daybreak on January 1, 1863 with the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Wendy Luella Perkins wrote *O We Give Thanks* at a ministers' retreat to express gratitude for the bountiful food and abundant friendship shared by the community. She has adapted it for many occasions since. These words were written for publication in *Singing the Journey*.

Gather the Spirit was written by Unitarian Universalist singer-songwriter and activist Jim Scott. It has become a favorite hymn across the denomination. Jim has served on the board of the UU Musicians Network and was Co-Chair of the ecological/spiritual activist group, the UU "Seventh Principle Project."

The lyrics to *Where do we Come from?* can be found, in French, in a painting of the same name by Paul Gauguin which hangs in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Composer Brian Tate (b. 1954) lives in Vancouver, B.C.

Composer Malcolm Dalglish is a hammer dulcimer player from Bloomington Indiana. *For the Future*, *Great Trees* and *Shake These Bones* are movements from his larger work, *Hymnody of Earth*, for choir, hammer dulcimer and percussion, which was originally written for the American Boychoir. *Shake These Bones*, with words by the composer, may be viewed as a personal credo; the texts of the other two anthems are by Kentucky poet, novelist and essayist Wendell Berry [b. 1934].

Return Again was written by Shlomo Carlebach (1925-1994) a Jewish singer and composer, who was known as "the singing rabbi" during his long career. He recorded more than 25 albums of songs, setting traditional Jewish religious texts to contemporary folk music that is still widely heard in Jewish congregations from Hasidic to Reform.

This Little Light of Mine is an African American Spiritual that originated in the American slavery period. It has been a significant anthem of the civil rights movement and has inspired people of faith to carry their religion with them wherever they go and to "let it shine."

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Opening words

We gather this morning in the Pacific Northwest, in a church of our own creating. A meeting house, for the Church of the Larger Fellowship—its members and its friends. For each person in this room, for each person joining us by means of technology, may you know another's face and eyes, may you feel the warmth of the gathering, may this be for you a house of meeting.

By Mr. Kelly Weisman Asprooth-Jackson and Mr. Barb Greve

THE MEDITATION:

Please join us in a spirit of meditation. As you are comfortable: settle into your chair, breath deeply, close your eyes, and imagine we are journeying out into the woods...

These are the things you might carry:

A compass. Something true and certain to point to in times of uncertainty. A core belief or value you know you can plot a course from.

A map. A description of your world, if not your route through it. A story by which you make sense of what is.

A walking stick. A source of strength and solidity to help carry you over uneven ground. A love that supports you, a challenge that calls you forth, an anger that drives you on.

A tent. A place of rest and a shelter against the tempests of time. The sense of self you may retreat to and say, "If nothing else, I have this."

A knife. A tool to cut what binds and give a greater purpose to shape. The uses of an open, questioning mind.

A flashlight. A radiance by which to see, and to illuminate the way for others. The potential of your soul.

Strong shoes, long pants, and warm clothing for the journey. Protection for what is precious in you. Acknowledgement of our own vulnerabilities.

Binoculars. A means to sense farther and more clearly than you could have without help. The wisdom of teachers, strangers and friends.

First Aid kit. Admitting that things don't always go as planned. Recognition that we can take some of our tools along the journey with us.

Take each of these with you, and let go of what you cannot carry. You may visit it instead, from time to time, but so long as you hold it, you cannot depart.

And if you cannot bring yourself to leave, you will never come to know the trees. The forest path has lessons to teach you: soft, merciful places for you to sleep, and sharp thistle, too, to instruct you with its sting. In the shadows of its branches, your own light may shine more clearly and deliberately. Remain only in the short grass, and the tools and the treasures you have gathered will never be tested by use. Enter the arch of the welcoming wood, and let the self you bring to it be changed by the journey.

Reading – from *The Art of Travel* by Alain de Botton

[p. 56] “Of all modes of transport, the train is perhaps the best aid to thought” – this from Alain de Botton’s book, *The Art of Travel*. “The views ... offer us brief, inspiring glimpses into private domains, letting us see a woman at the precise moment when she takes a cup from a shelf in her kitchen, then carrying us on to a patio where a man is sleeping and then to a park where a child is catching a ball thrown by a figure we cannot see.

“On a journey across flat country, I think with a rare lack of inhibition about the death of my father, about an essay I am writing on Stendhal and about a mistrust that has arisen between two friends. Every time my mind goes blank, having hit on a difficult idea, the flow of consciousness is assisted by the possibility of looking out the window, locking on to [an] object and following it for a few seconds, until a new coil of thought is ready to form and can unravel without pressure.

[p. 46] “[Planes offer perspective too--] the clouds usher in tranquility. Below us are enemies and colleagues, the sites of our terror and our griefs, all of them now infinitesimal, mere scratches on the earth. We may know this old lesson in perspective well enough, but rarely does it seem as true as then we are pressed against the cold plane window, our craft a teacher of profound philosophy....

[pp. 56-7] “At the end of hours of train-dreaming [or plane-dreaming], we may feel we have been returned to ourselves—that is, brought back into contact with emotions and ideas of importance to us. It is not necessarily at home that we best encounter our true selves. The furniture insists that we cannot change because it does not; the domestic setting keeps us tethered to the person we are in ordinary life, who may not be who we essentially are.

“Hotel rooms offer us a similar opportunity to escape our habits of mind. Lying in bed in a hotel, the room quiet except for the occasional swooshing of an elevator in the innards of the building, we can draw a line under what preceded our arrival; we can overfly great and ignored stretches of our experience and reflect upon our lives from a height we could not have reached in the midst of our everyday business. We may be subtly assisted in this endeavour by the unfamiliar world around us—by the small wrapped soaps on the edge of the basin, by the gallery of miniature bottles in the minibar, by the room-service menu with its promises of all-night dining and by the view onto an unknown city stirring silently twenty-five floors below us.

“Hotel notes pads can be the recipients of unexpectedly intense revelatory thoughts, taken down in the early hours while the breakfast menu (‘to be hung outside before 3:00 A.M.’) lies unattended on the floor, along with a card announcing the next day’s weather and the management’s best wishes for a peaceful night.”

[Yes. We may feel we have been brought back into contact with emotions and ideas of importance to us. We have been returned to ourselves.]

“A Temple of the Heart”
Homily by The Rev. Dr. Patrick T. O’Neill
CLF Worship Service at General Assembly
Portland, Oregon 2007

It really is a pretty cool idea when you think about it, CLF. A church without walls. A congregation unbounded by geography. Imagine, a church with no Building and Grounds Committee! Why, it’s a minister’s dream! Of course, the bad news is we don’t have any rental income to help balance the annual budget. On the other hand, we don’t have any leaky roof to replace either.

Cool idea. This notion that a congregation can still be truly that: a “convoked people,” bonded and related one to another, even from afar, by a shared commitment to keep alive the common love for the Good, the True, and the Beautiful as expressed in our Unitarian Universalist heritage. This radical notion that wherever we might live, wherever we might go, we carry this congregation with us in our hearts, by how we choose to live in the world, by the values we choose to represent and be guided by.

Theologically and historically, we know the idea has significant precedent, several thousand years’ worth, actually. In Jewish history, Talmudic legend tells the story of how the great temple site in Jerusalem was established.

"Time before time," the story goes, "when the world was young, two brothers shared a field and a mill, each night dividing evenly the grain they had ground together. One brother lived alone, the other had a large family. Now the single brother thought to himself one day, 'It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly. I have only myself to care for, but my brother has children to feed.' So each night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary.

But the married brother said to himself one day, 'It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly -- because I have children to provide for me in my old age, and my brother has none.' So, he began every night to take some of his grain to his brother's granary.

Then one night they met each other half way between their two houses. Suddenly they realized what had been happening, and they embraced each other in love. The legend has it that God witnessed their meeting and proclaimed, 'This is a holy place, and here it is that my Temple shall be built.' And so it came to be that the first Temple was constructed in Jerusalem. For God is known where human beings meet each other, and discover each other, in love."

The implication of the legend is clear, no matter the theology: love is the only sure foundation upon which any temple worthy of the name must be built. No other foundation is strong enough to support a house of faith.

The great temple of Solomon in Jerusalem was the literal center of faith and culture for the flowering of the Jewish people. It contained in its Holy of Holies, the Ark of the

Covenant, the central symbol of Yahweh's Covenant with his Chosen People. That physical temple was the indispensable center of ancient Judaism.

We moderns, living at a distance of four millennia, can only imagine what it must have meant for the Jewish people when the great temple of Solomon was destroyed by the Chaldean army, and the Jews were led off into their years of bitter captivity in Babylon.

Up until that devastating experience, the Jewish religion was predicated upon the physical dependence of having the great Temple as its literal high altar. With the destruction of their temple, Judaism itself would have perished as a religion except for one great religious insight which the Jews never forgot from that experience. They learned how to carry their Great Temple with them in their hearts.

By learning to do so, the Jewish faith survived the Babylonian Captivity. It survived to rebuild the physical temple in Jerusalem again. And when that temple was also destroyed centuries later by the Roman army, the Jewish faith once again survived in the hearts of its people. And it survived the Great Diaspora of another two thousand years beyond that. It survived centuries of persecution, even genocide, and every manner of destruction visited upon its people, because, you see, the Temple carried in the heart - faith constructed on the sure foundation of love - is not subject to captivity or destruction, not by all the armies on earth.

CLF'ers, it occurs to me, have shared this same intuitive appreciation of the Temple of the Heart from its founding, and this is your secret. If Unitarian Universalists in general are the "loose constructionists" of organized religion, then the Church of the Larger Fellowship congregation surely must be our "loosest." You folks don't even own a clubhouse! You're spread out from Pennsauken to Pago Pago. You were a "virtual" congregation before the word was even invented. And you've done it beautifully now for many years. Through your publications, your on-line connections, your ministers and religious educators, your annual support, your generosity, and your vision of outreach, you have personally and individually carried this little Light of Unitarian Universalism into the farthest isolated corners of our country, our culture, and the whole wide world.

This is not to say that your unusual way of congregating once a year at the moveable feast of General Assembly is without challenge. Those of us fortunate enough to live near and regularly attend a local UU congregation can easily remind newcomers, as I do every week, that "if you've been attending here for a while and find yourself spiritually at home in this place, you're invited to make your membership here official." Well, let me extend that same invitation of welcome to all of you here and to your friends and family scattered to the four winds, who may not hear such an invite very often.

If you've been on the CLF mailing list for some time now, if you are a regular visitor to the CLF website, if you look forward to reading Quest each month with its guest sermons, its essays on UU philosophy, Jane Rzepka's little gems of columns, or Lynn Ungar's R.E. lessons - if you find yourself spiritually and intellectually "at home" here in these Unitarian Universalist ideas, at home here in this expansive faith, at home here with

these comrades and fellow pilgrims, - if you feel your heart is “at home” here in these Purposes and Principles – if you never imagined you would ever find anywhere a congregation to match that Temple you’ve always carried in your heart – well, welcome home! You remember what Robert Frost said of home – that it is that place where, when you show up, they have to take you in. Welcome home to the Church of the Larger Fellowship!

What a cool idea! Way to go CLF! Shine on, you make us all proud to be UU’s at heart!

“The Shelter of a Tree”
GA Homily, Portland, Oregon, 2007
The Rev. Jane Rzepka

“I’ll shake these bones and shout and sing my life away.” [from the anthem sung immediately before the homily] Well, I guess that would be one way to play it—shake these bones and shout and sing all the live-long day. And though that kind of sounds all footloose and happy and appealing, and while in general I *would* like to move in the more bone-shaking-shouting-footloose direction, I have to tell you the truth. I’m drawn to a different couple of lines in the song we just heard. These lines: “I’m hearing songs and melodies but when they’re out of mind,/ I’ll hear the sweetest peace of all left behind.”

The sweetest peace. When we find a lull in the action, when the songs and melodies of the life around us grows faint and finally quiet, how satisfying it is to know the sweetest peace. That’s in large part what religion is supposed to do for us, what spirituality is for. That’s what stays with us wherever we are, wherever we go, in the temple of the heart that Patrick was just talking about. The sweetest peace.

The sweetest peace? We’re in a convention center! We’re at General Assembly! We’ve all been shaking our bones, one way or another, all the live-long day for days. Not that peaceful. Quick! Get from the Portland Ballroom to OCC Room C123-124—good you’re here and sure, you can chow down some lunch and get to the plenary (there’s still one left) by 1:30 if this thing doesn’t run too long, but can you get to Powell’s and pick up your banner and make it to the CLF booth to see if we’ve marked down the jewelry?! Not really that peaceful. Not that spiritual. GA is not always so conducive to being in touch with that calm and loving place called the temple of the heart. And yet, and yet, what do we say at the CLF? We say “The Church of the Larger Fellowship—your church at home, wherever you are.”

As you’ve probably noticed, there is an old growth Douglas Fir lying oddly in front of the Convention Center—an 80 foot long, \$65,000 Douglas Fir, with Western Cedar, Hemlock, and little Douglas Fir’s growing in it. An occasion for pause. A keeled over tree amidst the concrete and steel of a convention center, is not business as usual where I live, and probably not where you live either.

Of course the meaning of an art installation is in the eye of the beholder, and Buster Simpson’s Douglas Fir is no exception. But we know that it intends to take us not to the light rail or the food court or the plenary hall, but to a place of the spirit. “I go among trees and sit still.” “My tasks lie in their places/ where I left them, asleep like cattle.” “All my stirring becomes quiet/around me like circles on water.” [from the responsive reading] Standing there in front of this public monument in a major city, we are not at all among trees, but we have been offered an invitation to be among them anyway, reminding us that wherever we are, we can access the religion, the peace, the temple of the heart that we ourselves have brought along. We can return again to the home of our soul, concrete and traffic lights notwithstanding.

Of course here in Portland, the tree connection comes easily. The local tourism folks are quick to highlight the nearby Forest Park, “dense and untouched forest land, the largest wooded city park in the United States.” It has been touched of course--for thousands of years the native people here in the Willamette Valley burned the valley floor at the end of every summer, eliminating what they saw as the threat of the forest, so they could grow their food.

But by the time the Unitarian minister Thomas Lamb Eliot arrived in 1867, the land was forested and the city of Portland was booming. Eliot didn't like the looks of Portland—it was callous, he thought, commercial, no moral center. The answer, he believed, was to incorporate the wild beauty and grandeur of the nearby forest into the city itself. He believed that the health, morality, and intelligence of the people of Portland depended on the existence of the forest. His was not really a persuasive case, but in the end, our Rev. Eliot's doggedness resulted in Forest Park. It is as we heard in the anthem: “Slowly, slowly they return/ To the small woodland let alone:/ Great trees, outspreading and bright,/ Apostles of the living light.” [Wendell Berry]

Nature is not an important spiritual touchstone in every religion, but it was for the Rev. Thomas Lamb Eliot here in Portland, and it is for most Unitarian Universalists, wherever we find ourselves. Which brings us back to this CLFish question about how to carry our religion along with us when the temple is a distant memory and the Douglas Fir too big to carry along even in an out-sized suitcase. Once we disembarked here in Portland, or deplaned, or stiffly stumbled out of the driver's seat, how did we return to our best and most grounded selves? We may have a geographical spiritual home, but for the moment, we aren't there. We're in Portland.

I remembered that the Rev. Patrick O'Neill here once told a story from the anthropologist Loren Eiseley's book, *Night Country*, so I looked it up. It seems that once upon a time, a little boy—Loren Eiseley himself—with a toy shovel and bucket in hand, lovingly planted a cottonwood sapling with his dad. It was a classic scene: a small town in Nebraska, a house with a white picket fence, and there in the yard, a father and son, digging a hole together, a hole for a tree that would offer them shelter long into the future. As it happened, their time in that house was short-lived, but the memory of this tree was one that Eiseley went back to again and again, one of those deep and nurturing memories that, over the course of his life, gave him a pocket of spiritual strength and peace whenever he needed it.

Now that Eiseley was nearing the end of his life, he felt he needed to revisit that tree. So he traveled the two thousand miles to the familiar address where the house and the picket fence still stood. And there, there, in exactly the spot where they had planted the cottonwood all those years ago, stood...nothing at all. Nothing. As it turned out, the tree had never taken root. For sixty years, Eiseley had known the shelter of a nonexistent tree. For sixty years, Eiseley had known how to return to the home of his soul using only the spirituality he carried with him.

That's our job too. Call it a temple of the heart. Call it the shelter of an imaginary tree. But know this: when the temple is destroyed and you are wandering, when the tree you staked your life on never took root, when you've been living out of a suitcase for days at a time, the abundance of our religion is always at hand. The abundance of our religion! The sweetest peace. Always with us. Your church at home, wherever you are.

So may it be with us. Amen.

Closing Words

The abundance of our religion! The little light within. Always with us. Your church at home, wherever you are.