

**First Unitarian Universalist Church of Berks County
Building Rededication
Rev. Sandra Fees
October 18, 2009**



Today is a day of celebration. We have worked hard and long to achieve the dream of making our two buildings one – of connecting our historic building to the row home next door.

This congregation set out on this adventure some years ago. I wasn't here when the "Chalice House" was purchased. It was an act of sheer will and foresight. The congregation imagined the possible need for the space if it were to grow. And the congregation moved ahead when the building became available. There were discussions and differences of opinion. Some said, heaven knows where we are going. Some said, we know within. Some were convinced we would get there. But not everyone.

For a number of years the building was rented to cover costs. There were times of doubt. Some wondered, should we sell Chalice House? Can we afford to keep it? Some wondered if the congregation could afford not to keep it. I was here when that conversation was still happening. We began to discuss what to do next. We had small town hall style meetings to decide what we wanted to do. There was continued growth in the congregation and in the number of children and youth. It became clearer that more space was needed.

Talk of selling Chalice House subsided. Talk of the scope and extent of a capital campaign to improve our space began. We dreamed aloud about connecting our two buildings into one facility. There wasn't a lot of debate. We seemed to share a desire to make our two spaces one. This would make us more family-friendly, create more classrooms, accommodate our growing need for meeting space, be more accessible and also make us more available to the local community.

We hired a consultant to help us assess the feasibility of a building project. We learned what was possible. Committees were formed. There was a committee to interview architects and develop the plan for the space. There was a capital campaign committee to create enthusiasm and raise money to make it happen. GoggleWorks became the site of a great dance party to kick off the campaign. Members and friends made pledges of financial support.

We chose an architect and contractor, and applied for permits. We waited. We waited some more. We waited a really long time. And waited still more. Then, the permits were granted. Construction began. We made hard decisions about what we could and couldn't keep in the project. For part of

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the time, we stored furniture in our social hall and moved our church office to my old office.

Sometime along the way, the economy hit a downturn, and we wondered together about the timing of our project. And then we moved forward. Yes, it was an act of faith and courage.

We waited some more and watched. Walls came down and walls went up. Floors were refinished. Carpeting was laid. New bathrooms were installed. A hole was cut between the church and Chalice House.

We wrote checks for the capital campaign. We continue to write to contribute. During all this, some waited impatiently for the project to be done. Others were amazed it was all becoming a reality. Some were just joining our community and excited by the energy and commitment they saw.

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And then one day the construction was done. The contractors and painters left. And there was still more work to be done. We moved our staff offices and set up classrooms. We cleared out old items we no longer needed. We hung artwork, historic pictures, and curtains. We cleaned and painted and organized. A project like this one takes a lot of intention, a lot of hard work, a lot of volunteers, and a lot of faith.

Today, my heart is filled with gratitude. And I hope yours is too. I am grateful to be part of this wise and courageous church, of this far-sighted community. I am proud to serve as minister of a congregation that has the faith and good sense to know when change is needed, when it is required of us, and to do what it takes to make that happen. I am grateful and proud to be part of a congregation that hears the call and answers it.

The work of building the connection between these buildings is complete. But the work and call of our congregation and the world is not. The work of building the common good, of building the Beloved Community, seems as loud or perhaps louder now than ever.

Our religion is not one that is self-satisfied for long. We like to celebrate, but we Unitarian Universalists are people of action and determination. We are people who embrace the possibility of creating the world we dream about.

How will we do that? How will we fulfill our calling to build the common good? What vision do we hold for the future of this religious community and also for this liberal religion of ours?

Walt Whitman wrote that "however sheltered this port, and however calm these waters, we must not anchor here." So, what now? Where are we going next? We know the answers to these questions, at least in part. We know we are using the newly renovated areas for religious education classes and staff offices. A new entrance enhances our gathering as a community as do additional meeting rooms. But how will these changes grow Unitarian Universalism and liberal religion in Berks County and in the world? How will they help heal a hurting world?

Earlier we wrote our dreams on sailboats. Our newly formed vision and mission team will be using these to help shape this work, and they'll be asking you for additional feedback in the coming months. But meanwhile, I want to share with you a few of those dreams. I want to share with you what you are dreaming about today.

Responses written on paper sailboats during the service are shared.

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These are our dreams.

We have a safe and sacred space here, a comfortable port. Let's celebrate but not anchor here too long. Let us be ever evolving, ever changing. Let us go together, propelled by the wind, by the breath of God. Let us be moved by the spirit to embrace our dreams for the future and make them a reality.

Amen. Blessed be.