

Service is Our Prayer

November 25, 2007

Lay Worship Committee

“Love is the doctrine of this church...and service is its prayer” (#471). Join us as we visit what “service” means for UU’s. We’ll explore the relationship of service and citizenship in a republic; outline the concept of a national service corps for the 21st century; and discuss how we might better express these ideas in service to our church.

2007-2008 Lay Worship Committee

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| Reading: | #471 Love is the Doctrine... | Williams |
| Hymns: | #298 “Wake, Now, My Senses” #121 We’ll Build a Land | Mikelson Zanotti, arr. McDade |
| Music: | “Do Not Walk Before Me” “Abraham. Martin and John” | Camus/Maxim Holler, arr. Lojeski |

Participants: Dave Arnold, Michelle Brown, Tom Brown, Logan Brown, Paul Crittendon, Paul Goddard, Susan Halverson, Dave Lantz, Gary Lawrence, Linda Lawrence, Misha Lentz

Chalice Lighting
November 25, 2007

You might be expecting me to talk this morning about how I met the love of my life here, but I won't. You might wish I'd tell the story of my childhood call to ministry being re-kindled right here in this room, but there's not enough time for that. You probably think I should say how grateful I am for all of the friends I've made here over the years and for all of the ways the people of this congregation have and do inspire me – and I am grateful – but today I want to tell a different story.

Church community was a big part of my life growing up. My parents were active in our American Baptist church, and much of our family life revolved around church activities and friends. I felt safe and loved in my church community. I felt challenged and inspired. But, like many of you, I began to question at an early age, prompting much squirming, stammering, and scratching of heads from parents, Sunday school teachers, and youth leaders. For the most part, the answers I received from them just didn't square with the God of Love in which they had lead me to believe...nor did those answers fit with what I believed to be the true meanings of the stories and teachings of Jesus. For me, Jesus was a hero, a role model. He championed the underdog. He taught kindness and humility and equality. He healed, he empowered, he inspired people to be and do their best.

As I entered high school and college, my minister and, as far as I knew, most of the people in my church community did not step up to live and lead like I imagined Jesus would have in the face of poverty, war, racism, and sexism. Even worse, they seemed to either avoid talking about or be oblivious to the issues of the day. I was disillusioned. I decided that was it for me and churches.

Fast forward to my young adulthood and the birth of my first child - after I had children, I knew that I wanted them to have the positive benefits of being raised in a loving church community. But I also wanted them to be free to question and explore. I wanted their questions and concerns to be respectfully considered. I wanted them to learn that even as children, they could make a positive difference in the lives of others.

Twenty-five years ago, through friends and co-workers, I found this church. Over the years, my children and I delivered Mobile Meals, participated in CROP walks, wrote love letters to terminally ill children, worked together in soup kitchens, chose holiday gifts for HIV/AIDS Task Force holiday parties, volunteered time to Healing Racism, Inc. and learned what it meant to be a Welcoming Congregation – among many other things. I am grateful for the lessons I and my children have learned here with and from you. I am grateful for the opportunities we have had to serve.

When I was a little girl, I came across this poem in a book on the living room shelf. It had a profound effect on me. Imagine my delight upon discovering these same words in the back of our hymnal when I first came to this church...words by Edward Everett Hale:

I am only one, but still I am one.

I cannot do everything, but still I can do something.

And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.

In the spirit of service, I light our chalice. --- Linda Lawrence

A Republic if You Can Keep it
Gary Lawrence

Scene: The courthouse steps of the Constitutional Convention, 1787. Several reporters are milling around, waiting for the delegates to come out. They are all carrying microphones or notebooks. There might be a couple photographers too. Digital cameras, of course.

Reporter1: (MAIN MIKE): We're here this 25th of November, 1787, in Philadelphia, reporting live from the Constitutional Convention here at Independence Hall, where 11 years ago many of these same delegates signed the Declaration of Independence. The colony's Constitutional delegates are gathered to decide what kind of government our new nation might have – a task which some have called futile, because the War for Independence won't even end for another 2 years, and because nobody here knows for sure who will finally win! The delegates have been working on the constitution for the last three and a half months. We're especially hoping to see Dr. Benjamin Franklin, who has been a leader of the del -- oh wait! Wait! There's Dr. Franklin now!

Reporters (loudly, waving their arms, snapping cameras with flashes, et al): Dr. Franklin! Dr. Franklin!

DR. FRANKLIN ENTERS FROM STAGE RIGHT SIDE DOOR, LOOKING SAGE AND WISE, HANDS ON HIS LAPELS, SURVEYING THE CROWD OF REPORTERS. STEPS UP TO THE MIKE ON THE STAND.

Dr. Franklin: Good morning, all. Good morning. I have just a short time this morning, just time for a couple questions... waste not, want not, I always say

REPORTERS ALL MOAN

Reporter2: Dr. Franklin, what's the news from the north? Any relief for Washington and the Continental Army yet?

Dr. Franklin: The French are still saying they will support our cause and engage the English – when the time is right.

Reporter1 (loud aside): Right, right. Pretty soon the French'll be teaching us all how to fry potatoes, too.

EVERYONE LAUGHS (HOPEFULLY)

Reporter3: Dr. Franklin – what's the news from inside, from the delegates?

Dr. Franklin: We've been at it all day. Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise, I always say.

REPORTERS ALL MOAN LOUDLY

Reporter3: No no Dr. Franklin – I meant the government, what form of government are we going to have?

Dr. Franklin: We'll have an excellent government, one that is proactive and protects the people's rights. A stitch in time saves nine, I always say.

REPORTERS ALL MOAN LOUDLY AGAIN

Reporter1: Can you be a little more specific, Dr. Franklin?

Franklin (more serious): We'll have a responsible government. One that won't get caught up in wasteful and expensive feuds with foreign lands. One that values education of all its citizens above all things. One that takes care of its poor and disadvantaged. One where all people, regardless of station, will receive the best health care. One that is fiscally responsible, that can work well within a budget. You know what I always say...

MOAN LOUDLY. TOGETHER (sing-song): "A PENNEY SAVED IS A PENNY EARNED."

Reporter2: But Dr. Franklin – tell us. What have we got, a republic or a monarchy?

PAUSE. ALL GOES SILENT.

Franklin: A republic, if you can keep it.

PAUSE. (Let it sink in.)

Reporter3: A republic?!?! There aren't very many republics around in this day and age, are there Dr. Franklin?

Franklin: You're right. There have been only a handful of republics in all of history, and most of those are small and very far away.

Reporter1: But you said "A republic, if we can keep it." What do you mean, "if we can keep it"?

Franklin: I may not know a lot of things (smiles), but I know people. Human nature. A republic, to survive, needs not only the CONSENT of the people but also their ACTIVE PARTICIPATION. A republic is not a machine that can run itself. Free societies don't stay free without the constant and continuous involvement of their citizens. A republic will mean we all have to work at it, every day, every way.

Reporter2: But we DO work hard, Dr. Franklin. We do. Most people these days are VERY involved and active in their communities.

Franklin: Give it a few years, child. Let us win this war and get prosperous. Then people will get selfish - lazy. Caught up in their own lives and their own well-being. Before you know it, people will think they're being good citizens if they just pay their taxes and vote once in a while.

FRANLIN SIGHS LOUDLY, LOOKS DOWN, PERPLEXED

Reporter1: But what do we do, Dr. Franklin? How do we keep this republic we've fought so hard for?

FRANKLIN: You have to show up, you have to be there, you have to engage. Do well by doing good, I always say.

REPORTERS ALL LOOK AT EACH OTHER. SILENCE. NO ONE MOANS.

Franklin: Good day, all. Good day. Thank you. I have to be going now. "He who hesitates is lost," you know.

REPORTERS ALL MOAN LOUDLY.

FRANKLIN TURNS TO LEAVE, WALKS OFF THE STAGE AND OUT THE SIDE DOOR, STAGE RIGHT. REPORTERS PAUSE A MOMENT, THEN ONE AT A TIME YELL THEIR QUESTIONS AFTER HIM FROM THE MIKE AND CHASE AFTER HIM

Reporter1: Dr Franklin, Dr Franklin - Ben. About that girl in Paris. Fifi. The kid was only 15?!?!?

Reporter2: Dr Franklin – the kite-and-key thing. Did that really happen? Was it REALLY a dark and stormy night?

Reporter4/Photographer: A TURKEY? The national bird a TURKEY? Do you know how stupid turkeys are, Dr. Franklin?

Reporter3: Come on, Dr. Franklin - Poor Richard – who's that? How poor was the guy? Who was he? Does he really exist? Why won't you tell us? Huh? Can ya, huh huh? Pretty please? Dr. Franklin? Dr Franklin?!?!

Last reporter runs off. END

Gettysburg Address
Abraham Lincoln

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation: conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war...testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated...can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war.

We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate...we cannot consecrate...we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us...that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion...that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain...that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom...and that government of the people... by the people... and for the people... shall not perish from the earth.

Adapted from
John F. Kennedy's First Inaugural Speech
January 20, 1961

(Gary Lawrence)

Today people hold in their mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty, and all forms of human life.

We believe that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state.

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution nearly 250 years ago.

Let the word go forth, from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans, tempered by war, disciplined by peace, proud of our ancient heritage and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this Nation has always been committed.

United, there is little we cannot do.

Divided, there is little we can do.

Let us begin anew, remembering that civility is not a sign of weakness, and that sincerity is always subject to proof.

Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.

Let us explore what problems unite us, instead of belaboring those problems that divide us.

Let us invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors.

Let us join in creating a new endeavor, a new world of law, where the strong are just, where the weak are secure, and where peace is preserved.

Each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe.

Now the trumpet summons us again – not as a call to bear arms, not as a call to battle, but as a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself.

The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our lives and all who serve freedom – and the glow from that fire can light the world.

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.

My fellow citizens of the world: Ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

Ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice we ask of you.

ALL TOGETHER:

With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, knowing that here on earth all good work must truly be our own.

OFFERTORY

Lily Tomlin once said,

98% of the people in this country are decent, hard-working, honest Americans.

It's the other 2% that get all the publicity.

But then again – we're the ones that elected them.

In the spirit of decent, hard-working, honest people everywhere, let us now give to this our church as we are willing and able.

If you are a visitor, please be our guests and keep your money today – this church is our responsibility and we gladly take that responsibility ourselves.

A Case for National Service

Time magazine, September 10, 2007

By Paul Stengel, with reporting by Jeremy Caplan and Kristina Dell

Adapted, condensed by Gary Lawrence

Between 1944 and 1956, 8 million returning veterans received debt-free education and low-interest mortgages or small business loans. The GI Bill helped assimilate these young Americans into a new post-war society, and helped turn America into a middle-class nation. A new GI Bill for national service involving men and women, young and old, could help secure America for the future in a global economy.

When Americans look around right now, they see a public school system with 38% of fourth graders unable to read at a basic level. They see the cost of health insurance escalating as 47 million people go uninsured. They see a government that responded ineptly to a hurricane in New Orleans. And they see a war whose end they do not completely value or understand.

After 9/11, Americans were hungry to be asked to do something, to make some kind of sacrifice. And what they remember most is being told to go shopping.

Today something else is happening. Polls show that while confidence in our democracy and our government is near an all-time low, volunteerism and civic participation since the 1970's are near all-time highs. In 2006, 61.2 million Americans dedicated 8.1 billion hours to volunteerism. That's 27% of the population engaging in civic life. Dr. Franklin would be proud.

"National Service" is perhaps an idea whose time has come. Virtually every presidential candidate has made some statements regarding a national service plan. "National service is an issue that has been largely identified with the Democratic Party and the left of the political spectrum," said John McCain in a *Washington Monthly* essay. "That is unfortunate, because duty, honor and country are values that transcend ideology...National service is a crucial means of making our patriotism real, to the benefit of both ourselves and our country." End quote. Many of our young men and women have made their patriotism all too real by volunteering to fight two wars on foreign soil. The commitment of soldiers abroad has left others yearning to make a parallel commitment here at home, especially in education and health care.

Here's what a voluntary plan for universal national service might look like:

1. Create a national service baby bond. The Federal Govt would invest \$5000 in a 529 type-fund every time an American child is born. The investment would total roughly \$20K by the time that baby reaches age 20. The money could be accessed between the ages of 18 and 25 if he or she commits to one year of national or military service.
2. Make national service a cabinet-level department. Give the plan the visibility and status it deserves.
3. Expand existing national-service programs like Americorps and the National Senior Volunteer corps. David Eisner, CEO of the Corporation for National and Community

Service called Americorps “the best-kept secret in America.” Triple the size of Americorps from 75K to 250K members – take it to scale.

4. Create an education corps. 25% of all school age kids do not have a supervised activity between 3:00 pm and 6:00 pm on schooldays. 50% of the high school dropouts in the US come from 15% of the schools. An education corps would be a group of tutors, teachers and volunteers that would address these and other education problems like low reading levels.
5. Institute a summer of service. Institute a “right of passage” for students in the summer between junior high and high school.
6. Build a health corps. Volunteers help the nearly 7 million Americans that are eligible but not enrolled in government-sponsored health insurance get signed up, and bring much-needed attention to under-served rural health clinics.
7. Launch a green corps. Combine the concepts of FDRs Civilian Conservation Corps and a group that would improve national infrastructure to combat climate change.
8. Recruit a rapid-response reserve corps. Never have another poor response situation to a national emergency like Katrina.
9. Start a national service academy. Provide a focused education for people who will serve in the public sector and thereby create a new generation of civic leaders. Provide a free four-year public service education in exchange for a five-year commitment to public service after graduation.
10. Create a baby-boomer education bond. Over the next 20 years, 78 million baby boomers will retire. Many seniors are interested in second careers influenced by a spirit of service. Over half want to work in education, health care and the non-profit sector. Just as Americorps members receive scholarships for volunteer work today, these baby boomer volunteers would be able to designate a scholarship of \$1000 for their children, grandchildren, or other designated student for every 500 hours of volunteer work they do.

Check with your presidential candidate on their National Service plans, ask the hard questions, and talk with your vote next November.

The courageous souls who signed the Declaration of Independence pledged “our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honour.” The least we can do to keep the Republic is to pledge a little time.

What's In It for Me? Gary Lawrence

You might think a sermon segment titled "What's In It For Me?" is going to be a few thoughts on what "doing well by doing good" will do for you – how good it will make you feel inside, how much better you'll sleep at night, how much more of a contribution and difference you'll be making to your country and your community.

Well - you'd be wrong. Not that these things aren't true – but that's not what this segment of the service is about.

Putting this service together made me think about service and my personal obligations to serve, if any, and what it might mean to me as an American, as a member of this community, and most specifically as a member of this church.

What's in it for me, you ask? Well, here are some of MY thoughts, in an eight-point plan for quantifying, recognizing and appreciating service better at UUCR:

1. Measure and recognize service. Quantify the amount of volunteer hours it takes to run this place. The things you measure have a tendency to become important. Service is important. Put a number on service, monitor that number, and watch what happens. Set some goals. Find out how many people are volunteering. Find out what percent of the congregation that is. Measure the number of volunteer people and hours, and improve on it each year.
2. Make a service pledge. I've often heard it said that the one thing we UUs don't talk about much is money. Yet once a year we embark on a month-long pledge drive to prove that wrong. I think the one thing we UUs don't talk about very well today is SERVICE. We talk about service in general, but not in quantitative or personal terms. Yet people are hungry to serve. We should each be making an individual service pledge to this church, just like we each make an individual financial pledge. In many ways a service pledge is much more fair than a financial pledge. We're all educated and employed differently, we're all at different stages of our lives and careers, and we all make a wide variety of monetary compensation in our work and life situation – but we all have equal access to 24 hours every day.
3. Get specific. We need to do a better job of communicating and publicizing the specific service opportunities of the church. Our request for volunteers is often pretty vague, ie it's not specific enough. What we need is a matrix, something like a volunteer spread sheet, ok? This service matrix would identify the service opportunities in the church, and quantify them in hours and commitment needed.

- a. For instance, if you want to be in the choir, the service matrix would say: Be prepared to spend up to four hours a week coming and going to rehearsal, and practicing and participating in the service on Sunday mornings. Throw in a few more hours for two Music Sundays, a candlelight holiday service, and a choir potluck or two. Multiply that by the roughly 40 weeks a year that the choir sings, and you're talking of an ideal commitment of 160 hours a year per member.
 - b. On the service matrix, "choir" would be listed as a 160 hour opportunity – right next to committee chair, RE teacher, or maybe even Board member.
 - c. Extended, this means the choir, with an average of 20 members, puts in over 3000 hours a year in service to our church. Stated another way, it takes 20 people a week to give us the choir we have...
 - d. If you want to do something less involved, with less long-term commitment, you could be an usher or a greeter or help with the Kairos mailing one week. You'd see from the matrix immediately what service opportunities are available to you and fit your schedule.
 - e. The service matrix could be hung in a prominent place in Deale Hall or in the atrium for all to see, and put on the church website.
4. Have a Fund Raiser. Let's start a pool to see who comes closest to guessing the number of volunteer hours it takes to run this place. Something like the 50/50 raffles at high school football games. \$5 or \$10 bucks a shot. 80/20 split of the pot, with the majority of the money going to the church. Why not?
 5. Make a service pledge an obligation of new membership. Every new member that signs the membership book should make a service pledge of a certain number of volunteer hours a year. This service pledge is a small minimum number of service hours an individual or family is expected to give in a year, just like the small minimal financial pledge that is required to cover the costs for Kairos and other church essentials for members. This service pledge could be around 20 hours a year. Then let's watch our new member retention numbers – I'll bet they'll improve, because ALL new members will get involved quicker.
 6. Have Everyone Make a Service Pledge, and Re-Sign the Membership Book Yearly. Renew our individual commitments to service yearly. All members, young and old, would make their yearly service pledge, and at least virtually "re-sign" the membership book each year, maybe in an annual "service service" to renew our vows.
 7. Recognize Service – Often and Much. Create opportunities to catch people doing something right and good. Recognize service and contributors sincerely and often. Who are the top service contributors each month? How much of their own time did they give up for us and the church? Let's specifically recognize

service more often than at the end of the Annual Meeting each year with a single award.

8. Include our young people in service expectations and rewards. FDR said, and I quote: "We cannot always build the future for our youth; but we can build our youth for the future." End quote. The National Educational Longitudinal study of 1988 found that 42% of young people that volunteered in high school did so again eight years later. The American Educational Research Journal identifies community service during high school as a strong predictor of voting and volunteering in adulthood. The youth of today are our strength for tomorrow, and our assurance that this republic we hold that is our church will carry on after us.

I'm suggesting some heady stuff here, stuff we usually don't talk about. Let's break the stigma, break the taboo. Let's really talk about SERVICE. Let's have everyone in Rockford talking about what those crazy UUs down on Turner street are doing. When someone says, "What do I have to do to be a UUCR member?" let's stand straight and tall, look them right in the eyes, and tell them with no shame or hesitation: "Think. Feel. Act. EARN your place here with Service."

The returns far outweigh the investment.

Thank you

CLOSING WORDS

Let's close with these words from Winston Churchill:

WE MAKE A LIVING BY WHAT WE GET – BUT WE MAKE A LIFE BY WHAT WE GIVE.

