



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister
The Reverend Don Randall, Community Minister

“Expanding Our Vision, Expanding Our Space”

© by the Reverend Alison W. Eskildsen

A reflection delivered on January 8, 2017

At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

Centering Thoughts:

A person who has planted a tree before he dies has not lived in vain. African Proverb

Form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union. Frank Lloyd Wright

Your sacred space is where you find yourself again and again. Joseph Campbell

Falling in love with a place is like falling in love with a person; once you are in deep it's best to have a long-term committed relationship, one that requires sacrifice. Commitment implies protecting, nurturing, and defending. Mary Pipher, in SUSTAINABLE PLANET: SOLUTIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Reflection:

You've heard many stories this morning. You heard an ancient folktale and a few personal testimonies of how important and meaningful this Fellowship is. In African Namibia, the San Bushmen having a saying that if you have no stories you have no home. For the San, stories make a home.

UUFA's building and grounds house a religious or spiritual home because we fill it with stories—the stories of our births, our graduations, our marriages, and our deaths. We also fill this place with the stories of our heart—our hopes and dreams, our joys and sorrows, and our questions and wonderings. This is where we come for comfort when times are tough and where we come to celebrate when times go well. This is where we share the stories of our lives and make connections with one another, connections that matter. This is a special, holy and sacred place.

Sacred means set apart, something reserved for holy purpose or for divine presence. What can be more holy than witnessing the passages of our lives? What can be more divine than our coming together to be the best we can be and to make the world the best it can be? We set this place apart from the influence of common culture and the worst of what we can be in order to raise ourselves up to something better. This is holy ground.

A Fellowship or congregation is not a building. It is the people who fill it with their living. And we who live in this facility make it sacred every day, by all that we do within it. Like the skin of our bodies which houses our minds and spirits—our very being—this building houses our coming together, our being one in community. This building also hosts the larger community because we share our space. And sometimes our two communities join as one for a great purpose.

Just as we must take care of our bodies, we must take care of this facility. Just as the clothes on our bodies become outgrown or worn out, so too, this building can become outgrown, worn out and tired. And it has.

So now is the time to expand this special place so that we can continue to gather to celebrate our lives, ask the hard questions of life, and make a difference in our world. Like the ant in the African fable, we must be wise and plan ahead.

In Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's poem, "Generation to Generation", he writes,

In a house which becomes a home, one hands down and another takes up
the heritage of mind and heart, laughter and tears, musings and deeds.

We have taken up a heritage handed to us by those who came before.

This facility was not an immaculate conception. Nor did it spring forth magically like Athena out of Zeus' head. Twenty-four years ago the members and friends here at that time built this facility with their love, hope, faith, *and* their generous financial gifts. They took a huge leap of faith to purchase this land and build what we enjoy today. Those of you who contributed to that leap of faith years ago I thank you on behalf of all of us here today.

I met with George Koch recently. He was a member at that time. He told me after they moved in they considered roping off some of the pews because there were so few people and the space seemed so large. George said he and his late wife, Ruth, felt like they rattled around the building. He told me that nobody imagined they would ever fill the sanctuary up, much less need two services. But despite their doubts, they bought and they built. And we are their beneficiaries.

What will we leave for the next generation? Will we leave them a heritage of mind and heart, laughter and tears, musings and deeds? Or will we hand them an outgrown, worn out, building? Will we continue to turn people away because of our limited parking? Will we limit ourselves by the confines of our facilities? Will our legacy be something better?

It is my hope that you will consider what our tradition and this community mean to you and to others. Then ask yourself, what are you called to do to carry us into the future? Will you be a steward who sustains our growth spiritually, numerically, and organizationally?

Faith in you calls me to lay new foundations for our future. Faith in the value of our tradition calls me to lay new foundations others will build upon. Faith that my commitment to this community is not ill-placed calls me to sustainable stewardship for a future we will continue to be a part of. Faith calls me on.

May faith also call you.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. What contributing factors make a place special or sacred for you—the location or setting, the structure or architecture, your experiences or memories, or something else? Please describe.
2. What thoughts or feelings arise when you find yourself in a sacred or special place? Have these places evoked a feeling of something larger than yourself?
3. Have you ever been touched by a place, or changed by a place? Share.
4. How strongly is your commitment or connection to the Fellowship tied to your thoughts or feelings about the building and grounds? What might change that—for better or worse?