

“The Long Road to Being Home”©

Sermon by Rev. Duffy Peet

Shared with the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Bozeman, Sept. 24, 2017

Today is a very special day. As your order of service indicates, today we dedicate this building. The building dedication we will be doing this morning is the first in the history of our Fellowship, a history that goes back more than sixty years. For those of you who aren't familiar with the Fellowship's history, I encourage you to review the historical timeline that is on display in the Community Hall to my left. The timeline will provide you with a sense of what has led up to the important event we are participating in today.

This service of dedication is the culmination of a dream that has been held by more people than quite possibly any of us know. And this dedication has been a long time coming. It's origin can be traced back to the gathering of a small group of people at the Baxter Hotel in April of 1955. I was just three years old when that group met so I can say that was nearly a lifetime ago. The people at that gathering were interested in hearing what Monroe Husbands, a Fellowship organizer for the American Unitarian Association, had to say. In the words of Bob Dunbar, a former member of this Fellowship, “The small group which met with him in the Baxter Hotel met again in a week or so and decided not to affiliate with the Boston association but to meet fortnightly as a discussion group.” Four years later, in April of 1959, Dunbar writes, “a majority of the discussion group voted to affiliate and become a Unitarian Fellowship.” The vote was contentious and a sizable minority of the group left, never to return.

Within a few short years the Fellowship had grown and there was an active and thriving Sunday School. There was a desire on the part of some in the Fellowship to have a building of their own. The Fellowship was significantly split on this matter. Some had no interest in investing in a building. Some wanted to buy a lot and build on it themselves. And still others wanted to find and buy an existing building. When those who wanted to buy and build purchased a piece of land, several others who were opposed to this approach left the Fellowship. The Sunday School that had previously been thriving dwindled and was eventually discontinued.

The dream that this building represents then is more than fifty years old. Which leads me to wonder and to ask, is there anyone in this room today who was part of those earliest discussions of owning a building? (Add appropriate comments depending on the response to the question.)

I am very happy to note that the decision to accept the gift of this building, along with the commitment to raise the needed funds to renovate it, didn't create yet another split. It seems to me that instead of creating a split, this building has helped to create a heightened sense of community as well as a sense of accomplishment and pride. It has been a long road to actualizing the dream of having a home of our own. Welcome home Fellowship members and friends.

I stated earlier that this dedication is the culmination of a dream that has been held by quite possibly more people than any of us know. I wish I could name and acknowledge all of them but I can't. I can't even name each and every person who is here today who has helped to make this dream come true. Sincere and concerted efforts were made to create a display identifying all those who donated money specially

for the building. Hopefully, that display will be created and put up in the not-too-distant future. Yet even if it had already been created, I still wouldn't be able to name everyone who has donated. Some people chose to give anonymously. And there were a significant number of people who gave something other than money. Some gave of their time and energy while others gave of their knowledge, their skills or their talents. So while I can't name each person who has made the dedication of this building possible, I believe it is important to acknowledge and honor all those who have given of their time, their talents, their knowledge and their assets. And I want you to help me with the acknowledgement and the honoring. I would like us to begin in the present and with those who are here today. In the first portion of this acknowledging and honoring I would ask you either to stand or to raise your hand if you belong in one of the five categories I will mention. Since there are many people who will fit in more than one category, I would ask you to please remain standing or with your hand raised until I instruct you otherwise. And while we will probably feel like applauding, I would ask that we wait until I have gone through each of the areas I will mention. Now let's begin.

If you gave of your professional training, skills or expertise to make this building our home, please stand or raise your hand.

If you gave a financial contribution of any amount to make this building our home, please stand or raise your hand.

If you gave of your time and energy in such things as sweeping and cleaning, moving our possessions in or out, doing yard work, or attending discussion or planning meetings related to this building, please stand or raise your hand.

If you shared your ideas, your hopes or your concerns regarding this building becoming our our home, please stand or raise your hand.

If you have at any point over the years supported through thought, word or deed the dream of UUFB someday having its own building please stand or raise your hand.

I would ask you to take a moment now to look around. Notice those who are standing or have their hand raised. From where I stand seeing so many of you on your feet or with hands in the air is quite a sight to behold. But we haven't yet included everyone who deserves to be acknowledged and honored.

Now I want you to think about the people who aren't present at our service today that have worked to make this dream a reality. Maybe that would be a current member who wasn't able to attend for some reason. Maybe it is a member or friend who has moved away. Or maybe it is someone who is no longer living. They deserve to be acknowledged and honored today as well. In just a moment I would ask you to speak their name so everyone can hear. It is quite likely that more than one name will be spoken at a time. That's alright. It is important for their names to be spoken in this building they helped to make possible. We will include them now. Let the speaking of their names begin.

With great gratitude and appreciation I say thank you to all of you who are standing and who have your arms raised. And I say thank you to all whose names have been spoken. Let us show our appreciation with a rousing round of applause.

And now you may put your arms down and be seated.

At this point we have remembered the past and acknowledged and honored those of the past and the present who made it possible to get into this building. I believe it is time for us to look to the future. All of us have a future before us in this building. Now that we are in our building we have the opportunity to dream of what this Fellowship can be months and even years from now. What it can be for us. What it can be and mean for those who will someday walk through our doors. And what it can be and what it will offer to the larger community. We need to dream of a time ten years from now, twenty years from now and even fifty and sixty years from now.

As we dedicate our building we acknowledge that today is a milestone in a long journey, a journey that will continue for many years to come. The journey will be fueled by dreams, dreams such as the ones of those who first imagined this Fellowship having a building of its own. Yet while the dedication of this building is a milestone, the building must never be allowed to become a millstone—a millstone that we are tied to like oxen walking endlessly round and round it in a circle. For if this building becomes a millstone it will very likely become a tombstone. So today I invite you, no I encourage you and even beseech you to begin to dream about what this Fellowship needs to strive to become and attain in the years ahead. That is what the members and friends of this Fellowship who held the dream of someday owning a building did. They held a dream of what the future of this Fellowship could be. That dream was their gift to us. Those who will come after us deserve a gift as well. Not just the gift of this building as a worship space but the gift of a dream that will energize and inspire them on their journey together as a religious community. Today we acknowledge that this Fellowship has made a long held dream come true. From today forward, we need to be creative enough to develop dreams that go beyond the present and beyond this building. And we need to be courageous enough to take our dreams, our talents, our energy and our assets beyond these walls as we begin to transform a world that is crying for hope and compassion and love. May we, as a Fellowship, continue to follow dreams that are big enough to move us to actions. And may those dreams someday become a reality just as having our own building has finally become a long held dream which has come true.

May it be so.