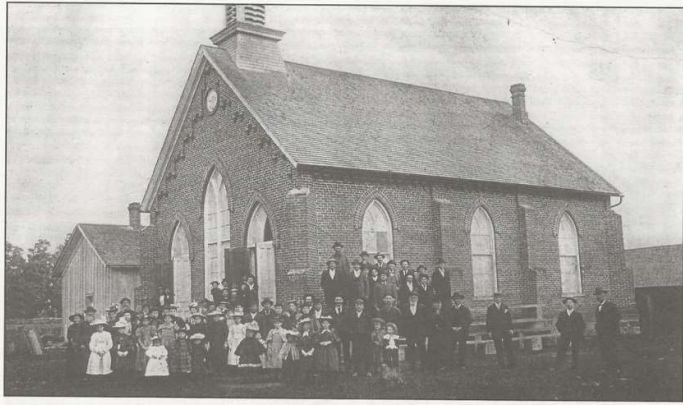


# Founded on the Faith

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

*Rev. Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel*

8 November, 2020



11. Circa 1896. Grange Hall at left, horse shed at right.

At the crossroads of Olinda Side Road and 5<sup>th</sup> Concession, in Ruthven, you can see the cornerstone of our church building. That stone was laid down just over one hundred and thirty-nine years ago, and the building has housed our Church for *most* of our Church's life.

This building is significant and we will celebrate it in due time. But as we breathe, we know that our church transcends our dear building, as we witness while we stay together as a community, even while apart.

Putting the technology aside for a moment, this is not all that different from the way our Church's founders collaborated a hundred and forty years ago, as they founded it, even without something that could be called a permanent home. As I have said for the past eight months, even before the building's foundations were laid, our church was there, founded on something even stronger than stone or wood – our faith that love is the most powerful force for good.

Where does this faith come from?

Already this year, we have reviewed some of the historical roots of our tradition, and *into* this year, we will continue remembering and honouring the past that has led to how we live our faith today. So, I won't do an extensive historical review here, but *would* like to recall a sense of our roots.

As we've talked about this year, the foundations of a universalist theology, that saw divine love as all-encompassing, were already a part

of the Early Christian Church, and for a while may have been, in fact, the prevailing understanding of Christianity, before being declared heretical in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

The resurgence to a universalism that we know today, comes from English religious refugees and continued to emerge into New England, as well as Pennsylvania, where universalist thought permeated throughout different denominations, including the Society of Friends (Quakers) and some anabaptists. Many folks, in questioning their theology came to the conclusion that the most powerful love there can be, is the one that ultimately accepts everyone, even if it requires tremendous patience, and calls for extensive self-reflection. John Murray was one of these folks, and last month, a place named in his honour, Murray Grove, hosted a virtual service commemorating 250 years of that universalist root in North America.

There have been shifts in our understanding, our professing, and our living of this faith that we are founded on. To paraphrase Jane Innerd in her latest account of our history, the *universal* has been writ ever larger, and the *ism* writ ever smaller, so that from ancient Christian roots, we understand and live a faith that seeks to transcend religious labels for the sake of a common vision of love that is accessible to all.

The other “U” in our current name, unitarianism, has some of its earliest roots in Transylvania, now part of present-day Hungary, where king Sigismund heeded advice that a religious harmony called for understanding among many faiths.

From old England, to New England; Pennsylvania and Transylvania, folks who have refused to be tied down by rigid doctrine, have searched for a theology that will invite deep connection with all who will seek it.

And that is a call that our Church’s founders heard, when they established an intentional community that placed their faith in an all-encompassing understanding of love, without exceptions, formally

founding this Church – this community of fellowship – on November 10, 1880.

They gathered as they could, until “Big” Mike Fox, who subscribed to this approach, was so moved that he donated a portion of his farm, to offer a more stable home for this already founded Church, commemorated in the stone laid on September 21, 1881.

Looking back over 140 years, some things look eerily familiar with that time when we were founded. Just as our founders first met by sharing their homes, each of our homes currently offer the physical walls that house our Church. First with about 23 members, and an eventual attendance between 24 and 35 around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our group is only slightly larger. From the beginning, there have been occasional worries about money and the prospects of our community’s sustainability, and through those worries, we have prevailed, through the perseverance and generosity of members and other supporters who find fellowship, knowledge and inspiration among all who seek truth, to live responsibly and courageously, and be of service to humanity.

Still, some things look different. In addition to the morning service, we find other ways to *be* the church, such as the coffee hour that was introduced by Rev. Conrad Dippel, which continues when we do meet in person, and which we also honour in the virtual space of our online services. Other legacies may be more subtle – the fact that I head into worship this week my home near Lake Erie, rather than the parsonage at the crossroads, is a legacy of Rev. Martha Munson.

Looking at Jane Innerd’s latest account of our history, I have to say that I was humbled when I saw my name as part of the history of this Church. And what struck me even more is all the other names that were mentioned. Names which often include people who I can see right now, at this gathering. In fact, many of the names that I call out on Sunday mornings, acknowledging their contributions to our Sunday services, are names that often came up in these pages. There are also names that I don’t immediately recognize, as well as names that aren’t there, but

which are also part of our history. In her account, Jane Innerd remarks: “It is not possible to name all of the people who volunteer their time and talents at Olinda. [...] Our volunteers are many and greatly valued. Indeed everyone who attends Church Services is a volunteer who helps to keep Olinda a vibrant Church.”

My friends, you who join in this reflection – wherever you might be today – make part of the living history of our Church of Olinda. A celebration of our church, is a celebration of you. A commemoration of our church, is a commemoration of all who have gone before us, named and unnamed. And contemplation about our heritage, is also contemplation about the heritage we seek to leave for those who are still with us and those who come after us.

My friends, a hundred and forty years may feel like an intimidating amount of heritage to contend with, but you continue to co-create this heritage as you embody the faith that this Church was founded on. My predecessor, Rev. Christine Hillman invites us to “...lean into its heritage for strength and insight”.

Recently, I heard a speech that invoked an inspiring thought, to not just keep the faith, but to spread the faith. My friends, we spread our faith by our words *and* by our actions. And our words and our actions are the product of our personal *and* community efforts to contemplate, to commemorate, and to celebrate, that which is most dear to us – our values, which stem from a foundation on the power of love.

My friends, this year, and beyond – let us contemplate, let us commemorate, and let us celebrate this foundation, that we may keep *and* spread this faith.

So may it be,  
Blessed be,  
In Solidarity,  
Amen

## **Opening Hymn #145 As Tranquil Streams**

~)-| Words: Marion Franklin Ham, 1867-1956

Music: *Musicalisches Hand-buch*, Hamburg, 1690, adapt.

WINCHESTER NEW

## **Hymn #290 Bring, O Past, Your Honor**

~)-| Words: Charles H. Lyttle, 1884-1980

Music: John Bachus Dykes, 1823-1876

NICEA

## **Closing Hymn #112 Do You Hear?**

~)-| Words: Emily L. Thorn, 1915-, © 1992 Unitarian Universalist Association

Music: William Caldwell's *Union Harmony*, 1837,

harmony by Eugene Wilson Hancock, 1929- , © 1984 Eugene Hancock

FOUNDATION

**National Sunday service, hosted by CUC, 15 November, 2020 at – 1PM –  
Instructions to join Zoom by phone (audio-only):**

Call any of these phone numbers: – *Long-distance charges may apply, depending on your phone plan* –  
**+1 647 374 4685 Canada**  
**+1 587 328 1099 Canada**  
**+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)**  
**+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)**

An automated voice will ask you for the Meeting ID, at that point, dial this number:  
**839 7977 9704**

The automated voice will then ask for a “Participant ID” – for this, you can just press the “#” sign  
 OR simply wait a few seconds for the next prompt.

The automated voice will finally ask for the password, at that point, dial this number:  
**365599**

You will then be joined to the live online service!

You may hear several congregants’ voices at the beginning.  
 Service is set to begin at **1PM Eastern Time**

**Sunday service 22 November, 2020 at 10:30  
Instructions to join Zoom by phone (audio-only):**

Call any of these phone numbers: – *Long-distance charges may apply, depending on your phone plan* –  
**+1 647 374 4685 Canada**  
**+1 587 328 1099 Canada**  
**+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)**  
**+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)**

An automated voice will ask you for the Meeting ID, at that point, dial this number:  
**899 0493 5686**

The automated voice will then ask for a “Participant ID” – for this, you can just press the “#” sign  
 OR simply wait a few seconds for the next prompt.

The automated voice will finally ask for the password, at that point, dial this number:  
**562792**

You will then be joined to the live online service!

You may hear several congregants’ voices at the beginning.  
 At 10:30am, Rev. Rod will begin worship.

Ray Stone can help you figuring out the technical details!