

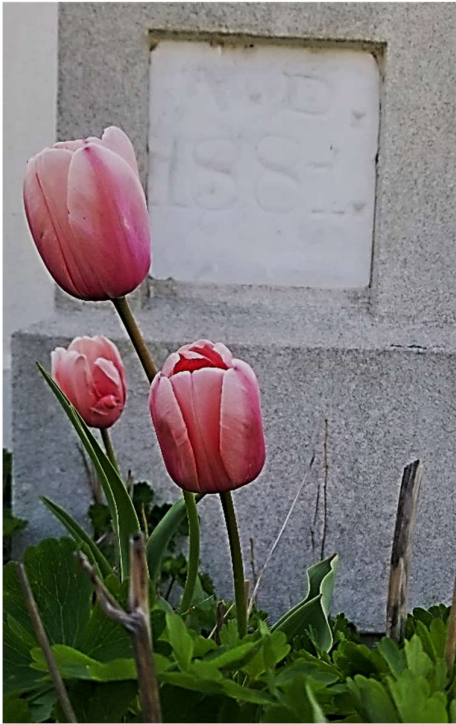
Upon this Stone

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

Rev. Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel

19 September, 2021

Time for All Ages – Building Blocks



"Cornerstone and Tulips" ©2021 Sarah Wert and Rod E.S.Q.

I'd like to talk a bit about one of the more popular building block options, which many of us may have gotten know as children, or while learning alongside children, or simply being adults finding a passion for building things up at home. It is the LEGO block (and no, this is not a sponsored bit), and I will say that there are sets that are in fact made specifically *for* adults, as that company has realized that imagination doesn't need to stop with age.

The standard LEGO building block has two functional ends. There's the bottom part, which can attach to a base plate, OR to a previous piece. And there's the top part which is covered with pips that always leave room for the next piece. From then on, almost every piece fulfills the same set of functions. Even the topmost pieces, which often have a smooth surface, for things like roofs, offer some flexibility, as they can always be removed... sometimes with more effort – but it can be done. In this way, whatever your imagination brings up, the toy allows you to adapt in order to meet the needs of your vision.

Now, our cornerstone is built a little different, but it serves a similar function. It is attached to the basement structure of the church, grounding it to the land where it sits. And, with the help of some kind of mortar, it can support different parts of the structure above it, and in the case of our church building, a lot of it is indeed bricks – not that

much different than the LEGO bricks (which kind of have their own built-in mortar).

And as the last 140 years have passed, some of these building blocks in our church building have had to be re-arranged to some degree, as the needs of the church have changed, the building has been adapted to meet its vision.

Even our roof pieces can be removed, some of them with more difficulty than others... and in fact, in the coming months, we may need to do just that, so that the building can continue to serve us safely and comfortably. And we, as a church will be discussing this aspect of our building at a congregational meeting next week (Sept. 26).

And whatever we decide, it will come from a place of imagination, from a place of vision, from a desire to allow our church building to serve us as a church, in the service of humanity.

(Sermon on Next Page)

Suggested Hymns:

Opening Hymn #1 Prayer for this House

Words: Louis Untermeyer, 1885-1977, © 1923 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, renewed 1951 by Louis Untermeyer, reprinted by perm. of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company

Music: Robert N. Quaile, b. 1867

OLDBRIDGE 8.8.8.4

Hymn - #52 In Sweet Fields of Autumn

Words: Elizabeth Madison, b. 1883, used by perm. of Hodgin Press

Music: William James Kirkpatrick, 1838-1921, harmony by Ralph Vaughn Williams, 1872-1958, © 1931 Oxford University Press

CRADLE SONG 12.12.12.12.

Closing Hymn ##108 My Life Flows On in Endless Song

Words: Traditional, Verse 3 by Doris Plenn

Music: Robert Lowry, 1826-1899

SINGING 8.7.8.7.D

Sermon – *Upon This Stone*



"Southern Inukshuk" ©2021 Rod E.S.Q.

In religious communities, it is a common practice to use *pageantry* as a way to re-create the stories that are central to a community's identity and core values, and in that way, to renew these foundations as a common experience among the community in the present.

In our cultural setting, one of the most obvious examples is the Christmas pageant, when the story of a humble family seeking shelter and safety – and eventually revealing hidden divinity –

is retold and re-enacted, so that this message of hidden holiness is brought to life once again in a more immediate, experiential way.

Other examples might be the many seasons of fasting that many traditions have, by which a group takes a collective activity that recalls ancestral struggle and scarcity – as well as promise and resilience! Many of you may be familiar with the rituals that come with Lent and Easter, and our Jewish neighbours will know the pageantry and momentary sense of scarcity that come with Passover and Yom Kippur.

Over the past year (and beyond), our church has unexpectedly collaborated in... a *pageant* of sorts, being that we have somewhat inadvertently participated – as a community – in *re-enacting* part of the experience that our founders had as they were forming our church 140 years ago.

Last November, we celebrated the founding of our church... without any of us being present in a church building – just as our church's ancestors had done when they founded our church... without even one

stone set down for a building. In that way, we have *recreated* the experience of our ancestors.

Of course, the founding of our church in 1880 came *after* a couple decades in which the Universalist message was already coming to life in our area. It was a culmination of many collective efforts to form a community, and live a life that embraced a more radical inclusivity.

This culmination was, in turn, just the *beginning* of a formal church *body*. And about a year later, this church body's work culminated in the *beginnings* of a church *building*, by laying down its cornerstone just about 140 years ago. This is because our church founders recognized that, while it *may* be possible for a community of faith to exist without a building, having a physical home can help it thrive, offering a stable space for the many activities that bring the community closer, as well as being able to become a more visible and *active* presence in the larger community.

The culminating moment of laying down that cornerstone, was in itself only the beginning of this building, which also took time to reach... *one* state of completion, a stage that led to later shifts, as the needs of the community have shifted. Our building does not look the way it did in 1881, or 1885, or for that matter, in 1999.

Today, we begin one step into having our building once again become a major part of our church life – that process is still ongoing, and will still take some time for it to reach... *another* stage of completion. And upon this step we build that next stage into our community's life.

Now, there is a set of stories in the book that is known as the good news according to Matthew, chapter 16. And... one interpretation of the stories in this chapter is that the prophet Jesus is exploring with his friends and followers the meaning of their ministry and the future of their community. As they are discussing this, one of the leading friends and followers of Jesus has a moment of clarity. My New Testament

professor would sometimes translate this follower's name as "Rocky", though it is more often translated as Peter, which comes from the Greek for rock or stone. Jesus points to his friend and follower, declaring:

"And I tell you, you are Rocky, and on this rock I will build my fellowship, and the gates of the underworld will not prevail against it."
[Matthew 16:18]

The *fellowship* or *assembly* that has been commissioned to Rocky, is more often translated as *church*. And in one of the many puns that show up in the biblical text, we see the coexisting reality of a church being founded on the people, *and* to a great extent on the places that are built *for* people in which to gather to continue building their assemblies – their communities.

One of the things we have learned over the past year (or so), is a somewhat contradictory lesson that physical meeting places are both: not *as* necessary as we might have thought, as well as *more* important than we ever realized. These are our current coexisting realities.

Yes, life can go on in other spaces, including online. No, it isn't the same. Yes, we have found new and exciting options. And... the option that *this* house offers, remains dear and irreplaceable.

The fact that we have not met in person over the last year and a half has not spelled the end of our community of faith (in fact, in some ways it has thrived beyond our expectations). At the same time, we have also felt the absence of our building in our lives, and we share a deep sense of loss at some aspects of our church's life that simply can't be fully replicated with our online options.

And the fact that our church was founded nearly a year before our cornerstone was laid, bears witness to the reality that our existence isn't *contingent* on having a physical space. Yet, the additional reality that –

soon after our founding – our community saw the need to literally lay down the groundwork for a meeting space, is also witness to the intense need for it.

The foundations of a community of faith that were laid down by 23 women and men, and by “Big” Mike Fox, in the years leading to 1880, are the rock-strong leadership upon which this assembly of faith is formed. And upon the cornerstone that was laid down in 1881, this community has found shelter, stability, and longevity – not exclusively, as our work has always gone beyond our walls – but as a base upon which we may find an anchor amid the tempests. Even now, this building is the oldest one in Canada in which a Universalist or Unitarian congregation has continuously gathered (even with the occasional pauses).

The additional options for reaching our community, which we have nourished over the past year or so, aren’t going away. We are easing back into our building... in a tentative manner, and the *additional* tools that we have to connect will remain.

This goes beyond the practical benefits that they give us in staying connected and offering further connection among the wider community, it is also a theological witness to our Universalist practice of radical inclusion. More options mean that we can include our community in ways that may better serve humanity.

My friends, this building is important, worthy of celebration and ongoing expectation to our reclaiming it, and it is only important insofar as it serves us, in the service of humanity. In it, we will increasingly find another space for us to grow closer together, and welcome all who seek truth in the spirit of inclusion.

My friends, alongside this sacred space, each of us offers a building block in this community, upon which its spirit rests and shines. And I

tell you, my friends, you are the building blocks, and upon these stones, we shall build our community, where fear will not prevail and love will be a more powerful force for good.

So may it be,
In Solidarity, in Love, and in Peace
Amen