

“Looking to Tomorrow”

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Today’s fabric is tomorrow’s quilt. We bring our unique selves to this sacred place; each with our own texture, color, pattern, weight and size. Together we sew moment by moment, person by person, one community, one holy cloth that brings warmth and comfort to all who are a part of it.

Today’s acorn is tomorrow’s oak tree. We plant here a seed that we hope to see grow into a church strong and enduring, giving shelter to those who are seeking. Our efforts in nurturing this community, tending to it and caring for it as though its’ existence counts on us is what makes it sturdy and resilient, flexible and growing.

Today’s stones are tomorrow’s wall. We build here a religious home that stands against hatred, stands for freedom of faith and openness that allows for difference and that protects and harbors souls. Our skills and talents are what create a community in which many belong and all are welcome.

Today’s visitor becomes tomorrow’s member. Only by attending to all that is this congregation today can tomorrow come with bounty and plenty. Only by working with today will tomorrow bring sustenance and vitality.

Today’s Little Stone Church that Rocks *is* the place that will bring a voice of liberal religious thought to tomorrow.

It is sometimes difficult to look to tomorrow when there is so much that needs our attention today. We manage it with varying degrees of success, sometimes not all the pieces are in place, it isn’t our best work, sometimes we miss some essential part completely, but we do manage to think of what tomorrow will require before we get there. We prepare for school projects and tests that are coming, we plan for our children’s futures and our retirement, and we

even look forward to holidays and vacations. It seems however, that when preparing for the future of our congregation there are many more obstacles. Partly because it isn't just one family or small group of people determining where we go, what we should and who we wish to be - all of us are involved in one way or the other, simply by being here. And then there is the old dilemma that we don't always want something that we already like to change. Change is hard and tricky, we cannot know that where we're going is where we really want to be and how it's all going to work out and that is uncomfortable and sometimes scary. But change comes prepared for or unbidden. How we face that change, how we anticipate and plan for it that is what matters most.

This congregation is not the same congregation I came to eight years ago. We have grown and matured, faced many difficult moments and dealt with many of them very well. We have affected one another in knowing one another. This is what the flower communion is about. Recognizing and honoring what we each bring here that touches others and what of others affects us. This annual ritual is also about celebrating who we are and appreciating what this congregation offers. What many of you might not know is that you are something pretty spectacular. Not to swell your heads or anything, but you are not the small, poor, insignificant church in the middle of nowhere you might think you are. In these past years there has been little that when we put our minds to it that we've not accomplished. And see here's the thing, we've been able to recover from the flood of 2003, repair the pillars on the tower, and thrive during the sabbatical because we've looked to tomorrow. The way to make it through challenging times is to believe that beyond them is something worthwhile, something worth the effort and the work. We have never failed to see past today into what tomorrow may bring, and that is part of our strength.

The other part of our strength is that we have learned that it is by our efforts that tomorrow will bring promise. Because of this strength we have been recognized as a shining star in the Clara Barton District of Congregations. We, along with four other congregations, have been invited to participate in a Growth Project. We have been chosen because we do things well; we work hard and face the future with anticipation and ready hands. Over the past several years we have grown in membership, adapted to new ideas of church and coped with our obstacles with grace. In short, we've been noticed! And here we thought nobody was paying any attention. Not only were they paying attention, they (the district leadership) think we have something to offer others, wisdom and learning and ideas, and they wish to honor us and support us in the work of being the best Little Stone Church that Rocks! And so, this past Wednesday night at their monthly meeting, the Executive Committee voted unanimously to take part in the Growth Project. Believing that not only do we have things to share with other congregations, but that there are others we can learn from as well. What better way to navigate our future than with companions who are there to support and encourage us as we are there for them. We are being given an opportunity, with some assistance and guidance, to take the next necessary steps in growing our congregation and deepening our relationships with one another and strengthening our identity as Unitarian Universalists.

This three year process will mean work for us all and it will require change, and it will not all be easy or comfortable. But here is the reality, today's Little Stone Church That Rocks is tomorrow's breakthrough congregation, the one to watch out for and the one where things are happening! We have much to share with not only other Unitarian Universalist congregations, but with our larger community. The Growth Project will help us manage our outreach, and new member integration better, it will assist us in determining the best governing structure for us as

we gain more members and how best to deal with the issues of our building. This program is a chance for us, along with the four other small congregations, to be proactive and intentional in our growth and in our changing, rather than having it just happen and some day in the future be surprised at who we've become. The Growth Project is the best way to look to tomorrow with purpose so that we can take care of our future.

In all this it will be up to each of us to hold onto the essence of who we are already while learning what more we can become. This is a journey we travel together, like the pieces of fabric that make the sacred quilt of community, like the stones that make up our religious home, it is together that we nurture today what we will build for tomorrow.