

"Home Sweet Home"

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"'Homecoming,' and 'ingathering,' 'start-up' are three terms for what we do each year on [this] Sunday after Labor Day," writes Rev. Dan Kanter. "With some fanfare, we officially end the summer, begin the program year of our education and music, [return to our active support of the efforts of this congregation] and think anew of what this church community means to us and the ways we are part of it."

"This 'homecoming,'" continues Kanter, "is not a single event which ends on [this] Sunday after Labor Day, but an ongoing process. For those individuals who have been part of this church for many years...homecoming is an ongoing process of deepening relationship with a familiar institution which is yet ever changing. For those who have been here just a month or a week, [or are new today], a homecoming may be connected to discovery..." of a new religious community and a new faith.

We call it homecoming because it is a time of returning, a formal recognition that we have, some of us, been away from each other for a time and now choose to come back together. We call it homecoming because for many this building and the people who come here are a kind of family, quirky, unique and complicated, but connected and needed all the same. We call it homecoming because here you can be all of who you are with imperfections and skills alike. We call it homecoming, because here we hope that your heart and your soul will feel at home.

We probably all know the infamous phrase, "Home is where when you go there they have to let you in." I've always had mixed feelings about this expression, because

though there may be some truth to it and we may laugh, there is an implied [] in it as well. Yes, we all need a place that will take us in and make room for us when we are at our ugliest, our most cruel, our most narrow-minded, and our angriest. We need a home that will forgive us our trespasses and our insults, our failures and our incompetence and our ignorance. But we need also a home that remembers our gifts, our talents, and our joy. We need people to remind us of what is good in us, in spite of what may be bad. We want to go home to a place that welcomes us because we are all those things and yet not constrained or tied or limited by them. I don't think we want to go home because they *have* to take us in, but rather because despite all in which we may disappoint we are loved and accepted for who we are. This is why we call today homecoming.

This may be an accurate representation of many of our own homes, either as children or in adulthood. For some, however, this is nothing like what home was or is. But this is the kind of home this church is and continues to become.

In her book, *The Journey Is Home*, Nelle Morton speaks of her understanding of home. She writes, "I came to know home was not a place. Home is a movement, a quality of relationship, a state where people seek to be 'their own' and increasingly responsible for the world."

Home, for some, may be integrally linked to a particular house, building, neighborhood, but the word home often elicits an image of people as much as place. Home can be a place in which we feel safe, protected, free to let our hair down and have an influence on things, if only in a small way. Home can be the place where we learn to

be 'our own' as Morton puts it, where we are encouraged to grow and change as life effects us and experiences come to us. Home should be the place where our transformation is celebrated and honored even if not always agreed with. Home is relationship, relationship to self and others and the world. That is why we call this Sunday after Labor Day homecoming – because home is about being connected and belonging *somewhere* with *someone* or several *someones*. Maybe even thousands.

“Thousands,” writes Carl Scoval, Thousands were in church on Sunday. And he couldn't be more right. Each week when we gather in this religious home, it is not just us who come to this sacred house of worship. For generations of families, individuals, visitors, ministers, have entered, worked, suffered, laughed, lived and died a part of this congregation. Their spirits and legacies linger here joining us as we return to our religious home. We too are joined by the thousands of people who left their mark many whose names even the longest time member among us may not know. But we are also joined through our remembrance by Virginia Smith (wife of Bob Smith), petite yet strong-willed; Barbara Butterworth, an elegant force to reckon with; Herman Enright, who offered some of the funniest stories in many of which he was the star; Harriet Hyde, whose laughter and joyous spirit filled the church, Fred Mossa, with his quiet kindness and quick smile; the Rev. John Agnew, who served this congregation with patience and a quick wit; Barbara Howe, with her stalwart strength; Mary Potvin with her quiet and unassuming smile; Shirley Crevier who had the biggest heart and most delicate artist hands; Loana Gadiare whose sense of humor and flashing eyes took in

more than she let on. And these are only those who have left us in the years I have been here.

Many of you could add to this list of names remembering those who made you laugh or who infuriated you; those with whom you shared a common interest and maybe those you never got to know well. This is what it means to be a living tradition, a living church, a home. This is a home in which each person that enters leaves a mark and those who stay awhile, their influence abides here always. Every person who claims this religious community as home in some manner changes us, effects who we are becoming, touches our lives, becomes part of the history and life of this church. So welcome home, whether for the first time or for the hundredth, for here you are joined and welcomed by thousands.