

by the Rev. Derek Parker

**Sermon presented on
the 100th anniversary of the
Universalist Church in Eldorado, Ohio
October 11, 2009**

Homily

I can not say that I have laid the foundations of any ministry that I have served. Be it campus ministry, ministry with a church, a hospital chaplaincy, or service with a religious charity - I was never the person who I laid the foundation. I was the person who came years later and built upon those foundations.

Not having founded a thing, you might think that I would feel sad or a bit inferior. But I do not feel that way. I feel privileged to be one who has built on the foundations others have laid.

A Jewish leader, the Neshkizer Rabbi, taught this to his students. "None of us are the Creator of life itself. Life is founded upon a power vaster than ourselves. And yet, each day that we awake, we are called upon to re-create our own lives. And so we are bound to acknowledge again and again -day by day- the power of creation both beyond us, AND also within us."

100 years ago, following a time of tragedy for this congregation - a time when our Ohio Street church was condemned as unsound and torn down, and the congregation was close to bankruptcy - a small band of the faithful joined with the Rev. Sarah Stoner to lay a new foundation. They pledged to worship weekly as a liberal church in the Universalist tradition, to preach and practice universal salvation, and to raise this simple brick chapel.

The foundation they laid has withstood the test of time. Six of our sister Universalist churches in nearby towns closed. This Eldorado congregation has remained. And for a short period of years, I was one of the ministers who has worked with you to build on this foundation. What we built in my time is no longer important, even though it was very important for its own time. But that time is now gone. The time for those ministries is now in the past.

What is important now is what you will build on the foundation we celebrate today. What will you build? What will you build for the generations that are yet to come? What do you want to give for the next 100 years?

It may be true that you could not beat this church to death with a stick. This church's doom has often been predicted. All of those past prophecies have proved to be false. But this does not guarantee the future. What will guarantee your future is the Spirit you bring to this community. What religious gifts that sustain your life, have you found here? As small agents of a LARGER universal salvation, do you see how you can share those life sustaining gifts with others in this surrounding community?

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It is a privilege to be apart of this faith community. Nobody here had a role in the founding of this church building. All of us have a role in this church's future. And we can not rest on the foundation, nor can we rest upon the work we did in decades past. This foundation was meant for us to build upon, and to reach out from this foundation into the wider community. This has been for the final purpose that we can encourage all souls to grow into harmony with each other and with the Divine.

May the next 100 years of this community be years of blessing, and may the people of the Universalist Church of Eldorado be a blessing to the people all around them!