

I appreciate the honor and the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon.

We are it seems about to embark on a great adventure in our congregational lives. We purchased a plot of land 4 years ago and an adjacent plot 2 years ago. Last month we voted as a congregation to approve a site plan. In our current newsletter there is talk about a capital fund drive next Fall to raise funds to pay for construction costs. All this groundwork has been laid but what lies ahead is by far the most important part: The design and construction of a structure, our home, our sanctuary. I want this project to succeed. Frances and I have already made by far the largest, single monetary contribution of our lives to help make the second acquisition of the land possible. At the same time I am a little worried, being a world class worrywart, as Frances will attest to. I am worried that there isn't more excited "buzz" going on about the project. I worry that the burden of designing and trying to implement the project will fall on only a couple of stalwart individuals. I worry that there will be less than a congregational consensus for the project and, indeed, we are so small we clearly must have near unanimous and enthusiastic support to do anything worthwhile.

So, I am here to deal with my worries by preaching to you from my bully pulpit. What am I preaching? As I stated in the newsletter: First, let's all get involved in the project design and have fun with it. Second, let's try to come up with something that reflects our deepest religious sentiments.

What do I mean by "our deepest religious sentiments"? I translate this to mean that our project should maximize harmony with our particular plot of land, and harmony with the earth as a whole; in short, create something that we can be proud to call "Green". I feel that if we stand for anything as a religious community we will surely give this consideration. I should acknowledge that three years ago in the "Facility Needs Report" prepared by our Building Committee environmental friendliness was identified as a high priority. So for many of you what I'm going to say may be merely a pep talk but that might be useful after three years. At the very least I hope to raise some issues and provoke a discussion.

At its very core what my religion is about, what I think your religion is about, is a sense of reverence and gratitude for Life, for Creation, for Nature. Isn't that basically what our worship services are or should be

about; what most of our hymns are about; what the flower communion we will do later is about: Reverence and gratitude for creation.

I am one of the growing number of persons who finds inspiration in the writings of Thomas Berry. He describes the universe as a single multiform celebratory expression. “The birds fly and sing; they build their nests and raise their young. The flowers blossom. The rains nourish every living being. The tides flow back and forth. The seasons succeed each other in a entrancing sequence. Each of the events in the natural world is a poem, a painting, a drama, a celebration.” (T. Berry, *The Great Work*, p. 18). Correspondingly, what happens to the outer world happens to our inner worlds. “If the outer world is diminished in its grandeur then the emotional, imaginative, intellectual, and spiritual life of the human is diminished or extinguished.” (Ibid. p. 200). Interestingly, Berry, a Catholic, gives credit for the articulation of such a profound mystique of the natural world to 19th century thinkers including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Emily Dickenson (Ibid. p.201). These are, of course, some of the same individuals we associate with our own UU heritage; our own New England transcendental, Unitarians had a similar vision of the universe. Through them we are or should be already wired into seeing the universe as a whole.

But in our lifetimes our world is undergoing something our forebears could only glimpse. In Berry’s view we are living at the end of a period in the evolution of the human species called the Cenozoic Era. In the late Cenozoic Era, about 10,000 years ago there was a shift to agriculture and to domestication of animals and to organizing into villages and cities. This is the foundation of our civilization, of our Judeo-Christian faith, of our whole outlook on life. We were instructed that we could and should take dominion of the animals and the fields. Nature began to be looked at both as an obstacle to be overcome and as a resource to be exploited. We joined together and created splendor. Yet, much of this, particularly in recent industrial centuries, has been disrupting to the functional integrity of the planet.

I don’t want to belabor this except to refer to some of the most eye-opening trends: Human population increased from 2.5 billion to 6.1 billion between 1950 and 2000, just 50 years. We have caused global warming. We are facing serious problems of depletion of aquifers and ocean fisheries, shrinkage in productive cropland and of forests, declining rates for extraction of hydrocarbon fuels and accelerating extinction of plant and animal species, not to mention the byproducts of industrialization: Toxic chemicals, radioactive waste, sterile and eroded soils, enormous waste heaps, destroyed wetlands, thinning ozone layer, etc., etc.

So we can't continue down this road, can we? But to really alter our path will require a huge change of consciousness especially in the industrialized nations. That is what Thomas Berry describes as "The Great Work". He says we all are called to lead "the transition from the period when humans were a disruptive force on the planet Earth to the period when humans become present to the planet in a manner that is mutually enhancing."(Ibid. p. 11) This is a radical change in which the human is no longer assumed to be primary in terms of value. Will our religions provide us the spiritual insight needed for carrying out this transition? A theologian named Daniel Maguire stated quite sharply: "If current trends continue, we will not. If religion does not speak to this, it is an obsolete distraction." (repeat)

It is in this rather sobering context that we contemplate our new building; our new sanctuary where we shall celebrate our awe and gratitude for the miracle of creation. And, where we will vow anew each Sunday to affirm life in all we do like good little UU's. Why not do exactly that now as we imagine our structure? We as UU's pride ourselves in being pioneers in social justice. Should we have the vision to be pioneers in this critical social arena? If we choose to do so imperfect decisions will have to be made but religious communities are always looked to for moral and ethical leadership. And, I suggest that we UU's have a special responsibility since other denominations may be more rigidly cast into an earlier religious imagination. I don't know another denomination that has a more apropos statement of principle. Our Seventh Principle is: We the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote...Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."

In every age among all peoples, their architecture reflects where they live, what they believed, what was important to them. The gothic cathedral, for example, reflected a concept of a vertical universe. What we design is not likely to be an expression of the medieval world. But, it is just as clear that it should not be an expression of an ethic of throwing up big boxes in order to create the most space for the least price. Many of us came to Whidbey Island out of a desire to restore touch with larger creation. I hope the sacred space we build expresses that ethic. We will shape our space and, in turn, it will shape us. And, it will have a shaping influence on our Whidbey Island community. Consider a moment: What story will our building tell about who we are? Will it say its creators were mindful, or mindless?

I can hear the brain wave buzzing. Some are saying: But Bill if we truly wanted to be utterly ecofriendly, we shouldn't build at all. Maybe so! But my sense is that if we can do this project in such a way as to model a relatively benign way of building and operating we will do more good than harm. Our land is already pretty degraded and perhaps we may actually be able to help in the healing. And, if this project results in liberal religion becoming a more vital and viable force on Whidbey Island I trust that the net benefit to the earth will be positive. But, wait, I can hear other brain waves humming and saying: Bill, we can't afford to go green. Again, maybe so! But maybe we need to be open to eco-design even if it does cost a bit more. Article after article I have perused claims that is not so or, at least, that long term savings in maintenance will more than pay back slightly higher, initial construction cost. Moreover, it isn't just our little UUCWI budget that we should be talking about. What may appear cheaper in the short-run may be more costly to someone else or to somewhere else.

My object today is not to acquaint you with specific eco-friendly techniques. There are literally dozens of examples which all of can go view right here on Whidbey Island, from RASTRA walls (recycled Styrofoam mixed with cement) to living roofs. I have compiled a list of local recourses on eco-design and will leave copies on the table outside the sanctuary. I also obtained a copy which is available for loan of a 225 page book produced in Seattle by Earth Ministry, called: *Greening Congregations Handbook*.

If there is a commitment to plan and build in a green way all the authorities say that the first step is for the congregation to adopt a set of guiding principles or criteria by which each of the myriad of decisions we will have to make later can be assessed. I want to offer a few of such principles as a start with the disclaimer that they are neither comprehensive nor well-honed. But what if we covenanted in every aspect of this project to:

1. Maximize use of local or recycled materials (thereby minimizing use of energy in manufacture and transportation).
2. Use only healthy, non-toxic products.
3. Prefer the hand of the craftsperson to be present rather than the stamp of the distant manufacturer.
4. Integrate existing site conditions into the design as much as possible.
5. Employ the principles of reduce, reuse and recycle at all times.
6. Design all spaces to accommodate multiple, potential, community uses (I included this because I think it would be self-centered and

wasteful to think we are only building to house our own services once a week).

7. Design to minimize the use of non-sustainable resources in ongoing operations. (Dare we even dream about something like going off the grid?)

I believe that if we establish a solid commitment to eco-design in this project we could get very excited. We are invited on an adventure of discovering possibilities outside the box. It is a chance to have fun and let creative juices flow. For my part, or I should say mine and Frances' part, a project with such a commitment would probably attract a financial and labor commitment at least double what a project lacking such a commitment might. But, just a commitment on paper to eco-design won't be enough. It won't work to just dump such a charge on Roy and John and say "Go with it". We all will need to pay close attention as this is a collective calling and so that the product emerges from our collective imagination. It will require a profound listening and willingness to subordinate personal agendas. If we are going forward with this project I pray we take these things to heart.

Amen, shalom and blessed be.

GREEN BUILDING SOURCES for UUCWI compiled by Bill Graves

Earth Ministry 206-632-2426: www.earthministry.org (offers free consultation and publishes 225 page “Greening Congregations Handbook”)

UUA’s *Green Sanctuary Program*: www.uuaspp.org/greensanctuary.htm or Director of Environmental Ministry, Seventh Principle Project, 703-862-2436.

“Greening Rooftops for Sustainable Communities”: www.greenroof.org

Architect specializing in green church design: Wolf Saar of Mithune Assoc., Seattle

Oberlin College

Environmental Home Center

Rocky Mountain Center

On waterless urinals: www.falconwaterfree.com

Langley architect specializing in environmental design and eco-materials: Matthew Swett, 360-321-4447; matthew@taprootdesign.com

Maxwelton Salmon Adventure 360-579-1272; www.salmonadventure.org (sponsors “Green Home Tour” and would facilitate per Nancy Waddell a viewing of local examples of green construction on request).

For reusable building materials: www.2good2toss.com

Natural Building Workshop (for students age 12-18), July 6 and 8, noon-4pm at Langley Middle School. Will construct a cob bench for the school. Cob is earth/clay mixed with sand, straw and water to form a medium, which can be used to build and sculpt. Materials fee \$25 (scholarships are available). Teacher is Eli Adadow, professional cob builder.

Information/advice on low impact site development: Curtis Hinman Extension Faculty, WSU Cooperative Extension, 253-798-3257; chinman@wsu.edu

On Puget Power rebates for use of energy efficient appliances and materials, and advice on energy efficiency: PSE Energy Advisor at 1-800-562-1482; www.pse.com

Hands on Natural Building Workshop on Whidbey Island, Aug. 16-22, 2004. For more information call Linda Lindsay at (360) 331-5471 or email llindsay@whidbey.com