

Messenger

My work is loving the world.  
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird —  
equal seekers of sweetness.  
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.  
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?  
Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me  
keep my mind on what matters,  
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be  
astonished.  
The phoebe, the delphinium.  
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.  
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all ingredients are here,

which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart  
and these body-clothes,  
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy  
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,  
telling them all, over and over, how it is  
that we live forever.

~ Mary Oliver ~

**THE MESSAGE**  
**Woodinville Unitarian Universalist Church**  
**March 25, 2007**

Thank you, Alexandra, for your reading of Mary Oliver's poem this morning  
and also to all of you here today. And thank you, Laurie, for leading the  
service.

Today I want to continue a theme I began two Sundays about our  
ministry. For you who braved the clock change that Sunday, you'll perhaps

remember that I spoke about the ministry “within the walls” of this building. I shared my hope that the work of church and its ministry would be taken up by the newest generation here that has always known this building and this land as home. I also used the metaphor of the first generation of builders passing the torch in a relay race that has no end. Of course, it means that there need to be willing and ready hands to take that torch. This is one reason I hope you’ll spend some time this morning at the Committee Fair tables after church and volunteer your time for an hour, 3 hours, or more each month to invest in our shared ministry.

Within these walls, our ministry and message to each other is well understood. We understand the language of our acronyms and many of us know by heart the chalice lighting words. We probably can even do a pretty good elevator speech about WUUC without the elevator. We help each other in times of need.

Then there’s the ministry beyond the walls. Some parts of that ministry might be called, using an unfortunate phrase, as “slam-dunk” ministry. The Equality Day in Olympia recently and our former Board President Andrea Jesse doing her testimony at the legislature are two examples. Our support of Tent City 4 and Hopelink are other ministries beyond the walls. The peace vigil on Monday night attended by folks like Mark and Skyler, John and CJ, myself and many others was a ministry beyond the walls.

Last week I asked Leanne Todd, our outgoing Office Administrator and also future church member, to give me a current newsletter address list for our regional audience. Here is a partial tally of addresses in that list based on a combination of zip codes and city identifications.

Bothell	57
Bellevue	7
Carnation	11
Duvall	28
Kenmore	10
Kirkland	19
Redmond	37
Woodinville	96
Snohomish/Monroe	49

Of course these are newsletter addresses and it doesn’t mean that everyone comes to church here. What it does mean is that there are people from all those locations who came here, wanted the newsletter, and sought us out for various reasons. I drew lines between Monroe, Bothell, Kirkland, Duvall and Redmond this week. Originally I was guessing about 25 square miles – it

turns out to be over 150 square miles. That's a lot of area for one church to cover. Admittedly it's in several clusters of groups but it does suggest we cover a wide region.

What is the message we at WUUC have sent to this 150 square mile region in 15 or so years?

First, of course, is the message that we exist. I have mentioned before that we are a gateway for liberal religion in the Cascade Foothills. We share that role with our church in Marysville and to a lesser extent with the Bellevue church. Our unique message is aptly stated in our mission statement that's on the front of your Order of Service. We will read it together for the closing words this morning.

However, "Existing" isn't enough for us. Many of our New England churches "exist" by being strictly franchise "this is our turf" churches. No one would imagine going to a UU church in the next town. It's just not done. Here in the Northwest, we are willing to be bold and try new things. "Just existing" for us would be like going to an espresso stand and asking for a cup of black coffee without anything added.

A second message has been that WUUC is a music church. I wasn't here last week but in Blaine to do a service there. I would guess from the attendance that the music service was appreciated and deeply enjoyed. That message of music, of the coming performance of David Roth, the expectation of good and even excellent music every Sunday is certainly a good message to the world beyond these walls. It's an important message but it's only a portion of one for a growing church. It's like adding flavoring to that black coffee but there's still a lot missing.

A fourth message has been to welcome and encourage the GLBT community to this church. Many of us took part in the Gay Pride Parade last summer, went to the Equality Day event in Olympia, and have taken the Welcoming Congregation class.

A fourth message we have sent in the last few years is that this is a church friendly for children and youth. It's always been child and youth friendly but we have many more youth and children's attendance in the last three years. Many of you here helped purchase and maintain the portable to add two more classrooms. Many have taught or helped in the nursery.

Cathy Tauscher has shared with the Board and myself the numbers of children and youth registered this year. At the moment, there are 128 children and youth registered. That's the highest number in many years. Attendance will fluctuate depending on schedules, space, and quality of programs and satisfaction level. According to the numbers Cathy gave me

this week, attendance has remained steady this year and new families register their children each week.

Clearly the message is getting out.

All these messages to the community beyond the walls are important messages but they aren't the whole message.

In the poem you heard and read this morning, Mary Oliver begins with a simple and clear mission statement. She begins with "**my work is loving the world.**" That love takes many forms in this particular poem. Actions like "**standing still,**" "**gratitude,**" and "**rejoicing**" are all ways to truly see and experience the world through an active love.

Her message to us is more than a complaint that she's only half-perfect or getting older or having a life that's frayed since her long time partner died. She says that her work is what really matters despite all else.

However, her work is not only a labor of driven intensity to get to the next goal. It is about standing still to truly see the world and be astonished. It's about rejoicing at the web of the world - sheep in their pastures and birds and flowers and the unfolding creation.

Her work is a sharing of gratitude and a shout of joy at the wonder of life and creation.

Perhaps her words might give us a new message for that 150 or so square miles of people seeking us out. Here's one way to say it: "**Our work is to love the world.**"

I don't think that says quite enough. There's one vital theme in Mary Oliver's poem that's left out of that message. I personally think that it's critical to add the word "joy". So here's another way to say the message:

"**Our work is to love the world in joy.**"

I joke about my home in New England where joy is considered just a bit sinful. I think we share that problem here. Joy here in the Northwest seems to be a driven joy. It's the joy of saying we climbed Mount Rainier in one day. It's the joy of driving 60 miles to Stevens Pass to ski for three hours. It's the joy of driving in the left-hand lane at the speed limit. As someone said to me, these are joys "**because we can do it.**"

Maybe so but I suggest that's the same joy as having a large black coffee with an extra shot rather than a coffee latte with hazelnut flavoring.

If our work is to love the world in joy, perhaps we might consider our children and what we hope for them and their world.

Here are two hopes people here have been talking about.

One hope would be to find ourselves two years from now with laughing children who have plenty of room in their classes to learn about inclusion, diversity, wisdom and the acceptance of hard questions. The work

of loving the world of our children might be to have a special funding campaign this next year to create space for more classrooms. The work of loving our children and our teachers might be to pay off the second mortgage. I am fully prepared and willing to not accept any pay increase for at least a year to help make that happen.

The joy, though, would be to hear the footsteps of many children from all over this part of the Cascade Foothills. They might come in each Sunday and always be ready to ask, **“where’s the joy?”** and we would respond, **“it’s right here; come on in and enjoy it together.”**

A second hope would be to help our other children waiting to be born. I speak here of our churches of the future. Our work of loving the world might be to help those seekers of liberal religion in outlying parts of King and Snohomish Counties. Imagine creating one or more new religious communities to support liberal religion for a new generation?

Imagine the joy of teaming up with the Marysville UU church and the District. We could work together rather than fall into the trap of rugged individualism that insists we must do everything on our own. Imagine the joy of seeing the abundance of Unitarian Universalist communities all over the Cascade foothills rather than the scarcity of welcoming congregations worried about competition.

Imagine the love that those people two generations from now might feel for us, their spiritual parents.

**“Our work is to love the world in joy.”**

Those hopes I just shared might well be seen as work disguised as joy.

So to close, I am turning back to the children’s time this morning. I would invite you to imagine what message with the word “joy” you’d send to someone “out there” in the wide world. You could imagine sending that message in a bottle tossed into the ocean. Of course that would be pollution so perhaps another idea is to imagine putting your message into a fortune cookie and sending it out for people to open and read.

What would be your one sentence with the word joy in it you’d put in a message to all those folks in their ocean of seeking a sane haven?

I have some favorites to start us off:

“Joy is not a four letter word”

“Joy is seeing compassion sprout wherever we step”

“Joy through work but through laughter, too”

What are your sayings with the word “joy”?

Let us make them become so.

