

from Alice

Monday evening, Sept. 14, 1992

Dear Member(s) of our Fellowship,

You know we have a Special Congregational Meeting coming up on Sunday, Sept. 27 at 7:00 p.m. Would that all of us could be present together to vote whether to stay and build at 210 Lee Way or to move and build on Churchville Rd. But some are not well, or must travel then, and for the sake of these the Board did vote to make absentee ballots available upon a Member's own request.

Kay typed the ballots today, and this evening Joe brought up a box from our basement, which I covered and labeled clearly Absentee Ballot Box. Tomorrow I shall put it on the RE desk in the front hall of the RE wing, where it will remain until the start of the Meeting on the 27th at 7:00 p.m.

I write because I don't want any who need an absentee ballot to miss having one. You may pick yours up at the Fellowship. Or you may call the Fellowship office (838-2377) or call me at home (836-2662) or call Kay at home (569-0975), and we will see that you are mailed a ballot, or I will bring it to you anywhere in Harford County.

If you mail in your absentee ballot, it must be received at the Fellowship by Friday, Sept. 25. If you hand deliver it, it must be in the ballot box before 7:00 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 27.

The Long Range Planning Committee will be in our Meeting Room at 6:00 p.m. If you have questions about the engineering and architect's report, you are cordially invited to come at 6:00 to discuss them. These matters will not be discussed at the Special Meeting itself, which will not be a long Meeting. President Ruth Sheridan will read a brief statement of the LRPC recommendation. Then each Member who wishes to speak will have two minutes to do so. Then we mark our ballots and the tellers will count them, along with the absentee ballots.

This has been a difficult decision for us. Why? Mostly for the best of reasons. Our Fellowship has meant a great deal to our Members and to Harford County for a full generation. Meaning for human beings is not something abstract that hangs or floats "above" bodies and things. Meaning is situated in given places. Over time it is associated, in memory and in expectation, with specific sights and sites. That is why church buildings, even as humble as ours, acquire power for good in our lives. It is properly very hard for some of our Members to contemplate leaving our Lee Way site and building. Here they have named their children, memorialized their dead, gained transforming insights, and struggled with lifelong friends for justice and truth. To think of leaving has felt like abandonment of the holy, even of their

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very selves.

Then it has been difficult especially for the Members of the LRPC because of the many technical problems with the shape and the lay of our Lee Way lot. Many of these good people have spent hours and hours and hours for two years or more learning about these issues, dealing with government agencies and trying to explain the issues to others. Some of them are very tired and have had to fight discouragement when it sometimes seemed nothing they said or did made any difference to those opposed to moving.

Then our decision has been difficult for some of our newer Members who have joined us with such enthusiasm and readiness to give of themselves to their wonderful new Fellowship family. These have been disappointed and puzzled by tensions they could neither deny nor identify. They have wondered what's the matter, why we can't just do it. And none could really tell them, for fear of seeming to diminish the very promise of quality in our life together, in which they wanted so much to believe.

And yet, dear friends, I beg you to be very heartened by two truths. The first is that these sorts of difficulties are not at all unusual. They are the price democratic churches must pay for the freedom of corporate decisions involving all the Members. That our decision has been difficult does not mean there is something wrong with us. We are just like all other human beings -- which is what Universalists are supposed to expect, after all. Moreover, the second truth is that we have done and are doing very well, indeed, and will. Despite disappointment, fatigue, tension and bafflement, we have almost all the time hung in there with civility, patience and respect, with hard work on many other concerns, with good times and fun and with the big one, LOVE. We've not been polarized into camps. We've not been so obsessed by this decision we could think of nothing else. We're okay, folks!

Our Special Meeting on Sept. 27 really should be a celebrative event. Our long term Members deserve to be praised to the skies. Their earlier and long success has led to our needing a new building. Our LRPC deserves to be praised to the skies. Their perseverance and faithful service has brought us to the point of decision. Our newer Members deserve to be praised to the skies. As new insiders of our community they are the occasion for our hope that our Fellowship may mean a great deal more to our Members and to our larger region for another generation.

Since delivery of the engineering and architect's report, and especially since we learned that the Felton property adjoining the Lee Way site is not for sale, I expect (though I may be wrong) that our vote will be to move and to build on the land Walter Banks has offered to sell us for \$70,000.

I'd like to tell you some other reasons for celebration that you might not

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know.

(1) This land on Churchville Rd. is an extraordinary bargain. It was appraised for \$120,000, partly because it is presently zoned agricultural. Equivalent acreage on Churchville Rd. zoned commercial less than three miles away is on the market for \$550,000. Ours is a very special opportunity we could scarcely hope to find at twice the price. The new location will give us very high visibility and central accessibility to all the established towns in Harford County and developing Cecil County and Pennsylvania counties.

(2) The price of the land is related to the traditions of our Fellowship. It is because our long term Members' work for racial justice is so well known that Walter Banks believes this land which was owned by his grandfather will be used "for something good" if he lets us have it. The name of Charles Reed is on the deed Walter will transfer to us if we buy it.

(3) There is reason to hope that our location so near a distinguished old Harford County African American community might help us to attract more African American Members. Whether or not it does that, it will certainly be a clear statement of our principles for all who know anything of Harford County history.

(4) We can financially afford to do what we need to do to be a yet more significant UU Congregation. I have some hope that some of our Members might provisionally pledge to give a substantial portion of the purchase price of the Banks land if the Members vote to buy it.

Next, we'll need to engage an architect to do building sketches so we can choose what to erect.

Then, with UUA staff help we'll need to do a proper Capital Fund Drive with a goal of \$150,000, the amount all the books say a Congregation our size can readily raise over a three-year giving period.

Then, we can borrow \$100,000 from our Association with lower than market interest rates for the first five years. We may also borrow from a bank.

We can sell the Lee Way site which has been appraised as worth \$190,000 for the whole thing, or \$140,000 for the front with the building and as much as \$74,000 for the back on which two houses might be built. Some feel sure the Lee Way site will bring those prices. Some think the appraisals are too high.

The point is: We can definitely come up with at least enough to make a good start on a good building, and maybe more.

Do not, please do not, leave your responsibility as a Member to

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others to carry out without you. Do, do please, every one, come to the Meeting on Sept. 27. Speak your piece. Hear what your Fellowship friends say. Vote your heart and conscience. And let us love and celebrate the result, together.

Thine,

*Alice*

P.S. We have the owner's permission to use the driveway of the currently unoccupied house on the corner of Churchville and Asbury Rds. If you haven't walked around on the Banks' land, do please, at your convenience go park in the driveway of the house, which you may enter from either Asbury or Churchville Rds., and walk around on the 3.68 acres on the toward-Bel Air side of the vegetable garden. The lot includes all the cornfield and the grove of trees toward Bel Air, and goes back to a line 20 or 30 feet behind the trees.

Thine again,

*A.*