

# Share the Bounty

Delivered at the [Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Harford County](#)

Rev. Lisa G. Ward

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## Reading

We bid you welcome to this house. It is a place we love and which we tend with care. We do not expect you to think the way we do, but only that you try to live a kindly, helpful life with the dignity proper to a human being.... Preachers here have the task of presenting religion freely, fearlessly and faithfully.... Hearers have the responsibility of testing what they hear, not only with the critical mind, but also in the living of everyday life.... The members of this congregation welcome the support of all those who believe that religion is wider than every sect and deeper than any set of opinions, and all who might find in their friendship strength and encouragement for daily living.<sup>†</sup>

On March 13th, 1955—nearly 49 years ago—a gathering of some ten liberal religious Harford County citizens met at 730 North Hickory Avenue, Bel Air—home of Art and Mary Woodward—to create an established Unitarian presence in the area. It was most important for these gathering folk to provide a liberal religious education to their children and the children in their lives. This took a couple years to come about, as folk in different circles began discussing the lack of a Unitarian voice in the County and the inconvenience of a commute to the nearest Unitarian Church in Baltimore. Florence Marzulli, Wilma Elton and Mary Woodward met some time before to initiate this first step in discussing the forming of a fellowship. With the help of the Unitarian Church of the Larger Fellowship (which is a correspondence program), and general word of mouth, 22 people were contacted for this first of many living room meetings.

*Out of the bounty of hospitality and hope  
we gather in fellowship today.*

By April 17th, in 1955, this growing group de-

cided to contact Munroe Husbands, director of the Fellowship Program out of 25 Beacon Street, Boston, then the headquarters of the American Unitarian Association. (We did not become a Unitarian Universalist denomination until the merger of the denominations in 1961.) By October, a Temporary Steering Committee: Charles Reed, Chairperson, Mary Woodward, secretary and Dick Reuyl, treasurer had formed.

One month later, on November 20, 1955, the first recorded business meeting was held at the Bel Air Library. By spring of 1957, five signatures were sent to the American Unitarian Association to officially register the Unitarian Fellowship of Harford County.

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<sup>†</sup>Taken from a UUFHC newsletter dated September 1981, quoting the Unitarian church of Dublin, Ireland.

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*Out of the bounty of intentional organization  
and gestures of trust  
we are here to be together today.*

Living room meetings got old fast. The Fellowship found its first home with the Seventh Day Adventists on Old Joppa Road in Wilna. The Adventists met on Saturday, this fellowship on Sunday. The fellowship immediately began social service, as this was the most vibrant expression of their faith, especially the conviction toward racial equality. A minority group met with the Fellowship and through their joint actions, the Human Relations Commission of Harford County was formed.

*The bounty of the welcome of neighbors,  
of claiming life's worth...*

In August of 1959, Charles Reed, a beloved lawyer in the County, filled out the necessary papers to create a religious corporation so that a 2 1/4 acre tract, lovingly named "Agnostic Hollow" could be purchased for \$5,000 on Lee Way in Bel Air.

Two years later, two Army surplus buildings were purchased from the Aberdeen Proving Ground for \$3,000. A wide hallway was built to connect the two buildings. It is rumored that the bulldozer was christened with a bottle of Sloans linament.

This began the seriously vibrant tradition of sweat equity amongst this congregation. The building's yellow paint was removed and two coats of white were painted by the membership. This congregation has decades of experience in bringing their whole selves to corporate

endeavor: heart, soul, body and mind applied to the making of a religious home.

Quickly this Fellowship's reputation was of a community of social action. The buildings were offered to many religious and community organizations for like-minded projects, ranging from stopping child hunger to mental health care. The most persistent collective voice was for racial justice, which included brave acts of dissension in KKK meetings and other forums. "We have been asked to help in integration" Emmett Pybus wrote, "we act now—or never." The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Harford County decided to act.

Some of the work in the 60's and early 70's include these highlights:

- Charles Reed, as President of the School Board, led the County schools from racial segregation to integration in compliance with the law.
- Members helped organize Chapters of the ACLU and the NAACP.
- Members participated in the drive for Black access to restaurant service.
- UUFHC offered their building for refuge to anti-racism and anti-war groups when needed.

*From the bounty of conviction, our Fellowship  
opens doors to embrace diversity.*

By 1984, a part-time extension minister, Rev. Goeffrey Drutchas, was hired. By 1988 the Rev. Alice Blair Wesley was called as UUFHC's first full-time minister.

These next few years were geared toward growth which caused a lot of dissent within the congregation. The congregation was on the threshold of change, a new adventure, which naturally brought about great uncertainty and a sense of peril. A vulnerable time. There were attacks from within and from others to obstruct progression. It was a reworking of identity, filled with power plays. The classic arguments of how to grow and who to lead the growth became so ac-

rimonious that 13 members resigned and another 6 removed themselves from membership soon after. This was a painful split, for a sense of ownership could not be fully relinquished by some into the expanding fellowship and new direction. A great sense of loss was felt by all. It was determined to find a new location for the growing Fellowship.

*By the bounty of experience, fielding change,  
and healing wounds this fellowship forges  
ahead...*

Rev. Alice Wesley described the discovery of this land in 1994:

...one day on my way to the office, I saw a man working in his garden on Churchville Road... I pulled into the driveway of the house next to the garden... as we walked towards each other, I realized the man was no stranger. He was Walter Banks, a distinguished Black leader, now elderly, widely known as the Harford County Father of the NAACP... that first time we talked of Walter's corn field as a possible site for our new building, he said he hadn't really thought of selling. I asked him to consider it... A day or two later, seeing him out working again, I stopped again, thinking just to mention...a tax deduction for anyone who sells land to a church for a price less than the appraised value. But...as we neared one another, Walter began our conversation by calling out, "I decided I'd let you have it."

The Banks offered the land, 3 1/2 acres on a well traveled roadway, for \$70,000: essentially \$50,000 less than its appraisal. That was only the beginning of the miracle. It was now up to 75-80 pledging units to come up with the money to purchase the land and build this church.

At a small lead giving meeting, ten people, amounting to seven pledge units met to determine their lead gifts. These members, exhibiting

an extraordinary leap of faith, pledged an immediate \$70,000 with promise of another \$74,000 later. These pledges were extraordinary in their generosity. More pledges, a UUA Building Loan and a Bridge Loan from a bank created the capitol to build this building.

This leap of faith directly impacts our congregational life today, as we carry a debt load from the purchase of this land and building, which now includes another acre, primarily rented by the Montessori school, to square off this prime Churchville location of rich love and history. We are direct builders of the dream, contributing dollars to give a home to a substantive Unitarian Universalist presence in this County. Next year will be the tenth year of church services in this highly visible location.

We also carry with us the hope and strength from efforts of heart, body, spirit and mind: Here is an excerpt from a Letter to then President John Buerhens by the Rev. Alice Wesley, dated Jan. 12, 1994:

How fabulous our story! So many people have made contributions, every one of which was absolutely essential and necessary if we were to do this, though only all together were they sufficient to make our future possible! Without the patience and keep-on-anyway determination of our Long Range Planning Committee Building Chair... Without our Vice President's knowledge of environmental issues and his high tolerance for governmental red tape... Without the fund-raising expertise and inspiration... Without the ingenuity, charm and brute labor of our Capital Finance (CF) Chair... without the steadiness, good humor and unflappability of our President... without the extraordinary generosity of the Banks (Walter and Maudeline) and so many of our Members... without the talent and work of all our folks in RE, human concerns, youth

programming, adult education, worship and music, who have kept high the quality of our fellowship programs while we wrestled with all these complicated matters... without any one of these marvelous people and their labors and talents, the UUFHC would be just another little fellowship, rocking along without hope of knocking on the door of being a larger and more influential church. We have a great history to live up to in a new era.

But as it often goes, from chaos comes creation, and the birth of this place had painful beginnings. Rev. Wesley ended her ministry with UUFHC in the midst of that chaos, and the fellowship carried itself through until Rev. Kathie Davis Thomas served for two years to help the growing congregation in its new era find its footing. I was blessed with the opportunity to follow Rev. Kathie and start serving this fellowship six years ago.

*From the bounty of beginnings and restartings  
and sudden endings and focused longing this  
room is filled with purpose today...*

Three years later this congregation voted to become a welcoming congregation, continuing the cutting-edge advocacy of civil rights, honoring, out loud, the welcome of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. We are known in the County, as well, for our work these last few years with AIDS awareness, domestic violence awareness, interfaith awareness, and support of the homeless. We invite many teachers of varying approaches to well being into these halls, which creates a spirit of welcome that reverberates far beyond these mere acres we inhabit. I have been told, and I would imagine so have many of you, that folk who had been searching for a spiritual home, found, after years of longing, a place for them in these walls and amongst us. Others found enough room for their own searching to clarify their needs and move on to find them. A valuable service to the well being of the world.

*This bounty, this abundance is immeasurable.*

*And if we take a moment to cherish its worth,  
we can do nothing less than feed its forming  
and fund its presence.*

This is the time of the year that we search our own hearts and see with our own eyes, all that this congregation and its many services gives to the quality of our lives. This is the time of year that we remind each other, that it is only through our contributions that the bills get paid and the services get funded. We are a free and responsible faith that exists because of individual effort toward its being. The building is paid for by us. The staff salaries come from our contributions. All that goes on happens because of the resources we choose to share. We are the congregation we've been waiting for, that is if we take hold of it and nurture its existence.

In these last few years, this congregation has opened wide its embrace of talking frankly and clearly about money. What a treasure that simple effort alone is to the health of this congregation. The stewardship drive has grown more each year into a time of hope rather than a time of dread; a time of making choices, rather than a time of making do.

We have the resources within our hearts and our pockets to make this dream work. As we have shared the bounty of lives past and efforts offered, let us continue to support a vibrant presence of Unitarian Universalism in our lives and in this County.

- By giving, I share in the bounty of this building, though problematic in its making, it focuses our gathering and gives space to others for individual and collective journeys.
- By giving, I share in the bounty of the utilities, which keeps us relatively warm and brings light to the rooms, so I can see what's written, read each other's faces and enjoy the colors of the walls.
- By giving, I share in the bounty of the music, which flows from musicians, through piano and guitar strings, or fills the room through cd's and by our sound system.

- By giving, I share in the bounty of religious education, the caring curricula, the stellar director of religious education, the art and writing supplies, the child care.
- By giving, I share in the bounty of our evolving faith—the various classes offered, the field trips, the justice work, denominational resources and guidance.
- By giving, I share in the bounty of office systems, phones, xerox, paper, computers.
- By giving, I share in the bounty of Sunday worship, the minister, candles, chairs, guest speakers, microphones.
- By giving, I share in the bounty of coffee and conversation, welcoming new insight and points of view.
- By giving, I share in the bounty of cleaning, plowing snow, cutting grass, salting walks.
- By giving, I offer a bit of my self to the larger hope and the bounteous life of this place.
- By giving, I take responsibility for something that supports my life.

*So may it be. Amen.*

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