

Charge to the Board

Rev. David E. Bumbaugh

[The Unitarian Church in Summit NJ USA](#)

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Unitarian Universalists are people who are fiercely independent and who believe that freedom of opinion and practice are at the very heart of reasonable and responsible religion. Our concern for freedom finds reflection in our style of governance. We are proud inheritors of the free church tradition, which in practice means that the local congregation is the final authority on all matters. There is no bishop, no synod, no superintendent who can tell us how to organize or operate our church. It is our church, and we are responsible for its health and welfare.

The most visible symbol of that reality is to be found in our Board of Trustees. Each spring, we elect women and men from the congregation to function as the governing body of the church, women and men who are responsible to their own consciences and to the congregation for the decisions which shape our life together. This morning, as we begin a new church year together, I would like to introduce the members of the Board of Trustees.

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CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: We, the congregation of the Unitarian Church in Summit, thank you for your willingness to serve us and this institution. We charge you to act in our behalf, keeping always in mind the traditions out of which we have come and the needs of the world in which we find ourselves. We pledge to you our support and our best efforts as, together, we work to build in this place a community based on reason, freedom, tolerance and love.

IMAGES OF THE SUMMER

The summer has come,
and is almost gone.

The trees are still green, mostly,

but here and there
on an occasional maple
there is a touch of red.
The goldenrod is yellow
and asters are blooming
in shady nooks beneath the trees
and the birds, congregating in flocks,
are discussing travel plans.

As is often the case,
summer has seen our community dispersed.
We have been here and there
visiting family and friends
and special places,
some new places,
some old, familiar places.
Now, on this Sunday after Labor Day,
we have come back together,
to reconstitute the community of the church.
We come, a little reluctantly,
bringing with us
our memories of the summer past.

Without a doubt, it has been a strange season.
In some parts of the country
it has been the coldest summer on record,
the year when summer did not come.
In our part of the world the peculiar weather
has generated a riddle:
What comes after two days of rain?
Monday!
My own memories of the summer season
are more broken and incoherent than usual.
It seems that I have been constantly rushing
from one obligation to another,
from one responsibility to another
with little time to sit and think.
But even in the midst of a very hectic season
there have been moments of special blessing:
My images of the summer include these:

One day in June,
in Alberta, Canada,
One day in June
when the sky was clear and bright
when the sun was warm
we stopped at a scenic lookout,

a place where we could see the fantastic shapes
of mesas and canyons.
Standing under the sun,
I noticed a rustling in the grass
off to my left.
There was a small ground squirrel
emerging from his burrow.
I thought he would run away
when he saw all the people.
Nonetheless, I stooped down and extended my hand.
He came toward me, without the slightest sign of fear.
Rising up on his hind legs, he touched my hand
with his front paws--a touch as light as a feather,
He sniffed my fingers, looked up into my face
and after a moment returned to his burrow.
Why he trusted me, I do not know
but when I think of this summer,
I remember one small, brown, ground squirrel
on a flat-topped mesa in Canada
who seemed to know I would do him no harm
and graciously welcomed me to his home.

And I remember a morning in Delaware,
walking the beach, one morning after a storm.
Suddenly, just beyond the surf,
out past where the early morning fishers
cast their long, thin lines,
I saw a dark, sinuous shape appear.
For a long moment I stood staring out into the ocean.
There it was again, and beside it another and another
dark curving shape, leaping from the water
and sliding down an invisible arc into the sea.
A school of dolphins, moving southward along the coast
cavorted in the ocean, out beyond the surf.
They did not know I was watching their antics,
but I found myself restored
by that brief vision of life, wild and free,
following its own imperatives
out beyond the surf, beyond the lines and lures
of crafty, early morning fishermen.
When I think of this summer,
I see the image of dolphins
rolling down the coast
out beyond the surf.

And I remember an evening,
when a storm was brewing off to the northwest.

The placid surface of the lagoon
was stirred into eddies by the rising wind.
A family of ducks,
a mother and ten young hatchlings,
swam intently up the middle of the lagoon,
seeking shelter from the impending storm.

Unswervingly they swam single file,
children following mother.
Suddenly I was aware of a sound of distress.
At some distance a very small duckling,
clearly the runt of the family,
was paddling as fast as its little webbed feet would move,
but was falling farther and farther behind the rest
as it struggled into the wind and the chop of the water.
In a high pitched cheep he signaled his distress.
The mother duck looked back over her shoulder,
made a quacking noise,
then circled back to the tiny duck.
The rest of the brood waited patiently
in the middle of the wind swept lagoon.
The mother duck reached the little one,
made a reassuring noise,
placed herself squarely in front of the tiny creature
and began swimming.
The little duck, swimming in its mother's wake,
no longer breasting the wind-wipped water,
found it easier to follow.
Soon the family was reunited,
and with the little duck, at the head of the line,
right behind mother,
swam off into the growing darkness.
When I think of my summer, I remember the ducks,
and remind myself
that it seems to be built into much of the world,
this impulse to respond to distress,
to care for one another.
Perhaps it was not love the mother duck expressed,
but it is close enough.

That is not all that this summer was about.
There were disasters enough
and sorrow and pain and grief enough
to remind us that existence is not all
beautiful sunsets, and peaceful vistas.
A hurricane named Andrew
destroyed most of South Florida;

a typhoon destroyed most of Guam;
a tidal wave smashed into the coast of Nicaragua;
forest fires burned some of the oldest trees on earth;
famine and fire and sword
ravaged Somolia and Bosnia,
and in this community, as in every town and village and city
acrosss the globe, people have mourned
for those who have died this summer.
All of this is part of the experience
we bring with us, at the end of the summer
when we return to reweave
the community of the church.

Take a moment now
to think about your summer.
Find one image, one memory, one thing you did
that stands out in your mind.
Think about that event,
find a word or a phrase which summarizes
that one image.
Try to find a color which is appropriate
to your special memory.
If your memory is of trees and grass,
perhaps your color is green.
If your memory is of sun and sand,
perhaps your color is yellow.
If your memory is of ripe tomatoes or strawberries,
perhaps your color is red.
If your memory is of cool waters
perhaps your color is blue.
If your memory is of people,
of children playing in the afternoon,
of friendships renewed,
of conversation and quiet moments
of quarrels and reconciliations
and words whispered in the night,
it might be any of these colors.
Not all memories are joyful;
not all summer days are bright and easy;
summer can also be a time of sadness,
for yourself or for others,
a time of loneliness and loss.
If these be your memories,
your color might be
gray or black or purple.

Find your color.

Now,
if your color is green,
we invite you to come forward
and weave a strand of green yarn into this web
which signifies the community of the church
the human community,
the community of life.

If your color is red,
we invite you to come forward
and weave a strand of red yarn into the web.

If your color is green,
we invite you to come forward
and weave a strand of green yarn into the web.

If your color is blue,
come weave your memory into the web.

If your color is yellow,
weave that memory into the web.

If your color is gray, or purple or black,
that too is part of the web of life;
please come weave that memory
into the web.

Now, back in your seats,
if you wish, take one moment,
and speak the words which capture your memories.
Take a moment to say aloud
the phrase, the word, the image
which captures your summer.
Say it to your neighbor.
Say it now.

A STORY FOR THE CHILDREN AMONG US AND WITHIN US.

As we all know, terrible things have happened
in our world this summer,
just as terrible things are always happening
somewhere to someone.
Most of the time
We cannot prevent these terrible things,

nor can we meet all the needs that have been caused
by wind and storm, by war and violence, by greed and indifference.
Yet we would find some way
to express our concern for our sisters and brothers
nearby and around the globe who suffer.
If we cannot halt the storm,
perhaps we can find some way to
help those swimming into the strong wind and tide.
To that end, some of us brought with us this morning
a small gift of food for those whose need
is so much greater than ours.
The children will bring that food forward at this time.
And some of us have brought checks
to be used to help shield our brothers and sisters
from the full fury of the storms.
We will now collect that special gift.

END OF SUMMER COMMUNION:

This first Sunday after Labor Day
we celebrate a time of transition,
a season of change,
one of the hinges of the year.

The earth, on its annual circle
now points us away from the sun.
Slowly the days grow shorter,
the afternoon shadows longer,
the nights cooler.
The season of change is upon us
as we dance the circle from spring and summer
to autumn and winter

The calendar says it is still summer.
Our minds read the seasons more clearly--
the sudden flocking of birds,
the subtle spots of red on the maple,
the fall of leaves in a quiet rain--
and we know we've come to summer's end.
Our hearts still cling
to warm sunlight,
to verdant trees,
to long days and short nights,
to the season of pause and renewal.
But already the work

and the promise
of autumn intrude.

As is our custom
this first Sunday after Labor Day,
we reconstitute the circle of community;
we welcome each other back
to the world of responsibilities and duties
to the homebound,
work-bound joys
of autumn and winter.

This first Sunday after Labor Day,
I would share with you a special season communion.
In each of these small packets
some tiny fragment of summer remains.
Here is captured the essence of sunlight
at play in flowered yards.
Here is caught the rich, redolent produce
of quiet herb gardens.
Here resides a reminder
of shadowy woodland glades--
all dried,
all preserved
against the inevitable waning of the sun,
the barren field and wood,
the inevitable ice and snow.

As we conclude our worship together this morning,
our celebration of a season of transition,
take one of these fragments of summer.
Take it home with you,
put it away somewhere special--
a place where you will not encounter it every day,
but at infrequent intervals,
when you are most in need of a bit of summer.

Then
in the midst of hectic activity,
may it give you pause
to draw into the circle of memory
this summer season,
to relive for a moment
the relaxed and lazy hours
when life gather strength
and renews itself.

Through the long winter which is coming,
may this small bit of summer
remind you of the season of life and hope,
drawing into your mind the metaphors and memories
which nourish your strength
and remind you of the meanings and purposes
of your own existence.