

**United Church of Fayetteville  
310 E. Genesee Street  
Fayetteville, NY 13066**

**Rev. Dr. Linda D. Even  
Sunday, August 23, 2009**

**BUILDING PLANS (I Kings 8: 1, 6, 10-11, 22-30)**

About two years after I arrived in Bay City MI, the church celebrated the centennial of its building. Like UCF, the congregation had been organized long before it built its building. It had begun meeting in someone's home, then a school house, then possibly a ladies' school of music, and then they built their first building. I was not serving in that first building. That building had burned down during the dedication service for its sanctuary, requiring that the congregation receive communion on the lawn while the fire was extinguished. A resilient people, they built again.

Also, like our congregation, who benefits from the efforts of our archivist, Nancy Schiffhauer, and historian, Sue Boland, this congregation too had folk who had extensive records of the history of the congregation. They were even able to produce for the pastors the order of worship for the dedication service 100 years before. We used it to prepare for the centennial celebration.

I am almost certain the text for the day was Solomon's dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. As it turns out, even if our archivists hadn't found the order for worship, they could have just handed us this scripture reading, because Solomon set the standard and provided the model for all time for the dedication of a house of worship. It goes like this: 1) a procession, 2) a poem, 3) remarks about the importance of the day, 4) a prayer that is incidentally addressed to God, but serves as a sermon to the people, and, 5) the whole thing wrapped up with a few comments about hopes for the future. If we learned from Solomon how to build in order to glorify God, to dedicate and maintain houses of worship, then we might also do well to pay attention to some of the things Solomon did less well.

Although he would sit on the throne for many more years, the dedication of the Temple was the high point of Solomon's reign. It capped a twenty year building campaign, thirteen for a palace for Solomon and seven for a house for God -- a campaign financed by crushing taxes and notable for full employment, if one counts not only paid craftspeople, but also impressed laborers.

Solomon's reign was known for its forty years of peace and prosperity, but it turned out to be peace and prosperity without a future. Without balance to his building programs, at his death, the kingdom was nearly bankrupt and collapsed into two nations almost immediately. Solomon's is a tale that demonstrates the power and possibility of building to the glory of God; and cautions us always to keep a balance among the three kinds of building plans. The plans have a rhythm of activity, and problems are created only when we get stuck in one indefinitely.

The first type of building plan is the one that determines what the building is going to be used for, for what materials it will be made, how it will be funded and the plan identifies where community priorities lie (for example, some congregations build a sanctuary first, others education space; I even know of one that built the kitchen first.) It also includes the actual building of the house of worship.

The second kind of building plan is for the appropriate maintenance, upkeep and transformation for changing needs over time: in other words, how a community cares for a building that glorifies God and serves the world. That's the primary stage that UCF has been in for the past four or so years with renovations of the lower level, the new sound system, the Access Project, the restoration of the Memorial Garden, still in progress, and the anticipated new heating system for the church and an energy upgrade for Jubilee House. It is valuable work, maintained at a high level of quality, work providing this space to serve the community for future generations. I am informed that just this week, the church received a letter from the Village of Fayetteville saying they want our church to be "House of the Month" acknowledging that upkeep and improvement.

As it happens: July marked this building's 150th year in service to a congregation; all things being equal sometime this winter, we will have paid off the mortgage on the Access Project (In other words, we'll own it – my criteria for dedication); next year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original planting of Memorial Garden; and it's been ten years since the congregation purchased the historic home next door for refugee resettlement.

We want to celebrate all those good gifts, the hard labor and sacrifice of our congregation; and keep UCF's historically successful rhythm among the different kinds of building plans. A congregation of any significant age has numerous anniversaries to celebrate and could consume all its energy remembering them. After consultation with our historians, archivists and other groups in the church, we are going to celebrate all those things on one weekend in the spring (Date: TBA).

As we do so, we are going to affirm our understanding that our purpose as a community is not to maintain this building for our use alone, but as a base for our mission and outreach efforts, supporting others in their growth, socially, relationally and spiritually; as well as continuing to encourage our own development in these areas through service to others. As you know, work has already begun to mobilize our shift in energies, in the use of our human and financial resources.

This is the third critical phase in a building plan for a community of faith: the constantly evolving consideration of how a sacred building is used to the glory of God in changing times; not only what happens inside it, but what mission and ministry flows from us to the community which surrounds us. This is not new to UCF. It's not work we haven't been doing, but it is work whose time has come for revitalization. The others don't go away; they simply assume a new place in the order of priority in this stage of our life together.

There has already been discussion of a major strategic planning effort, information has been communicated and more is forthcoming, as the Board leads us once again toward emphasis on this third type of building plan. We'll be working on issues like now that we have physical access, how do we create the psychological and social access which invites the community into this space; and perhaps more importantly how do we leave this place as a people equipped and committed to serve others and be a public witness to the power of faith in our lives and world.

There are shifts in where our emphases will lie, how each of us will be involved in congregational life – changes that will happen over time, but are essential for maintaining and growing the ministry we have been called and seek to do in this place. The Board has committed to increased mission on the ground here in CNY -- opportunities for hands on mission for people of all ages and the opportunities will continue to grow. As it assembles this year's budget, the Board is proposing shifting the proportions of how we spend out money – less on ourselves, more on others for whom Christ cares. This is a time to let people come to know us, not just by what we do in this place, but also by how we live with our neighbors. It is also a time to share and focus our vision for a new age, these are changes which will require from all of us -- cooperation, communication, flexibility, recognition that we won't get everything right the first time, and a trust in God and one another, that not only can we together engage these changes, but that they offer vitality, hope, growth and possibility for UCF life for many years to come.

The three types of building plans are all good and necessary; the faithful craft of building maintenance is a matter of keeping a balance among all three. May we continue, un-Solomon-like, but as our UCF ancestors have begun, so that our present ministry serves not only our generation but all those to come.