

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

**September 13, 2009
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RESIDUAL EFFECTS (Col. 3:14-17)

Today is a curious day in the life of a congregation to find oneself scheduled to preach. We need both to worship God and to honor the significant ministry of one who has been central to this congregation's worship life. My solution to accomplishing both critical goals is not to preach, but rather to offer a brief reflection and a charge to the congregation.

Everyone here has privileged awareness of Alice Dickerson Hatt's ministry, gifts, graces, and talents, varied by factors such as the length of time they have known her, the nature of the relationship, whether one was involved in music ministry or a beneficiary of it or other aspects of life together. Folk other than me will speak to much of that in ways far more intimate and informed than my own comments might be, simply by virtue of my tenure here.

Both during Alice's time here, and, in the last few months, as we have anticipated this day, as individuals and as a congregation, we have been articulate about the strength of the music ministry, the desire to maintain it, and Alice's particular gifts which have led to the development of UCF's music ministry. In addition to the offerings of the choir and instrumentalists, the development of young musicians and the identification of music gifts in newcomers, you are, as a body, much greater participants in the music ministry than you might realize. You know how to sing hymns; you know when to wait; when to keep silence; you know how to listen and appreciate music; you know how to learn and grow; you are open to a variety of musical styles; you are generous with sharing your musical gifts and you are committed to maintaining a strong ministry of music at UCF.

That's about music, but whether you know it or not, you know a great deal more about worship. It is my perception that you learned much of it from Alice, not necessarily by what she said, but by how she led and worked with you through the years. My reflections come through a particular lens – that of your preacher and worship leader. I'd like to tell you what I see residing in this congregation because of Alice's ministry in the broader scope of worship.

First, a story. For some reason, an exceptional number of clergy attended my installation, so that in addition to those on the chancel, there were three rows on either side of the aisle. I sat behind them with my family. That put me in position to monitor clergy behavior throughout the service. At the opening vocal notes of the first hymn, every clergy head spun around, Linda Blair-like, looking first at the congregation and then up to the choir loft. Without the startle effect, it was an action to be repeated at various times throughout the service, not just in musical moments.

A few weeks later, I received a phone call from the chair of some committee or the other, a pastor who said, "I was at your installation and that's a congregation that really knows how to worship. So I was thinking you would be a great person to lead our workshop on worship." I laughed and said, "Thank you, but you are asking the wrong person." If he'd have thought about it, he would have known that. No one teaches a congregation how to worship in a few months. New pastors have lots to do; congregations have been waiting for someone to arrive to start, stop or change direction in something. So it was a great gift to me to inherit a congregation that already knew how to worship, not just sing – but worship. I didn't work with previous staff members, but my service with Alice has shown me those values deeply instilled in you have come in no small part from her.

Whenever Alice and I have had any conversations about today's service, her comment, plea, statement was, "It has to be worship. It has to be worship," meaning that the service be a God-

directed, community activity. Alice, I can tell you that since the day that you announced your retirement, in all the brainstorming, all the planning, amid the great desire to show appreciation to you and for you, not once, not once in four months have I had to say, “That’s not worship.” This is a congregation that knows what worship is and what it is not and they learned that from you.

To say that “worship is focused on God,” means that all that we do here is offered to God and used to build up the community for Christ’s service. Now knowing what worship is, is a matter of sensitivity and intuition, training and perception, rather than reference to a rigidly structured event, unresponsive to God’s ever-changing creation. Worship can and does change from time to time and elements can vary from week to week. An authentic life of worship demands a community capable of fluid conversation, led by the Spirit, open to trying something new and then willing to evaluate whether through it, people were led to God and one another, or were merely transfixed by a fad or otherwise entertained.

Knowing how to worship means also means knowing the difference between the pursuit of excellence and the pursuit of perfection. Excellence is giving the best we have to offer, and nurturing our God-given gifts. A commitment to excellence as opposed to perfectionism leads to an inclusivity of spirit that makes room and encourages the identification and development of each person’s gifts, musical and otherwise, rather than a focus on a narrow menu of acceptable contributions. Pursuing excellence allows everyone from youngest to oldest set a rhythm, have a part to play, a word to say, a song to sing – each in their own way making a joyful noise before the Lord – (Not all at once, of course. The word for that is “bedlam.”)

Combined with a God-centered spirituality, a commitment to excellence leads to an offering that lifts the whole community into the presence of God, whereas a drive for perfection leads to a performance mindset that will not only be directed to other than God, but will shut out the participation of the whole community.

- So:
- *an appreciative knowledge of music
 - *a commitment to excellence that encourages and affirms every individual’s gifts
 - *a God-centered spirituality that knows the difference between offering and performance
 - *an inclusivity of Spirit that makes room for all

*a lack of rigidity that allows response to a changing world

Those may be said to be some of Alice’s characteristics, but by virtue of her 18 years in ministry here, they are no longer hers alone. Now they are ours. They are inside you and me -- the residual effects of her work at UCF. Another more common phrase for “residual effects” is “living legacy.” (Please note: I said “living legacy” and not living legend.” I also didn’t title the reflection, “Living Legacy” out of the very real fear that Alice wouldn’t come today if I had.)

A legacy lives only when inheritors of its gifts take them into themselves and use them fully. It is the nature of the human community than when someone has served so long and so well, their name will be invoked for some time to come. I expect to do it myself. When I do, it will be to remind us all of those things she imbued in the ministry of this congregation. Let me say them again.

- *a commitment to excellence that encourages and affirms every individual’s gifts
- *a God-centered spirituality that knows the difference between offering and performance
- * an inclusivity of Spirit that makes room for all
- * a lack of rigidity that allows response to a changing world

My charge to the congregation is that we look not to a new staff member, or to any staff member, or even to the person next to you for those things, but that we realize we have already received them and it is our obligation to offer them to one another and the community around us. It is incumbent upon each of us to use the gifts we have inherited from 18 years of ministry with Alice Dickerson Hatt. It is up to the whole body to keep them alive and vital, for they are not

merely a legacy that make for a strong and healthy music program; when used widely, they are the characteristics that build a strong and vital ministry of the whole church for now and forevermore. And let all God's people say, "Amen."