

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie  
Arlington Street Church  
29 June 2003

### **Minns Lecture: Arlington Street Church**

Here's how I wanted to begin this evening: Once upon a time, a group of Scotch-Irish immigrants known as the Presbyterian Strangers, having been forbidden to establish a church in the Boston of the first Church and King's Chapel,<sup>1</sup> gathered in a converted barn on Long Lane in Boston. The year was 1729.<sup>2</sup>

I figured that, half an hour from now, I should have covered our moves from the barn on Long Lane to a meeting house at the corner of Long Lane and Berry Street<sup>3</sup> (where, in 1788, the Massachusetts State Convention, under Unitarian president John Hancock, met and ratified the U.S. Constitution, and changed the church and location's name to Federal Street), and then, in 1809, to a third meeting house (built to accommodate the overflow crowds attracted by the ministry of William Ellery Channing).<sup>4</sup>

I should have covered our move here to Arlington Street, the first public building built in Boston's Back Bay – our fourth location, not including the two congregations that merged with us:<sup>5</sup> Hosea Ballou's Second Universalist Society, and James Freeman Clarke's<sup>6</sup> Church of the Disciples,<sup>7</sup> champions of abolition and suffrage.

I should have covered our first minister, the Calvinist Irishman Rev. John Moorhead, who served for 44 years and was eulogized as "an Israelite in whom was no guile,"<sup>8</sup> although he was a slaveholder, a common practice in the Boston of his day;<sup>9</sup> and Robert Annan, driven out by his rigid adherence to Presbyterian authority in post-revolutionary Boston,<sup>10</sup> and possibly by the women of the church;<sup>11</sup> and Rev. Jeremy Belknap, an ardent patriot,<sup>12</sup> who "identified his congregation with every progressive

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<sup>1</sup> Holly Hendricks, ASC Historian and Archivist, editorial notes

<sup>2</sup> The inscription on what we now know as the Long Lane Cup (historically used for communion) reads, "Gift of Mrs. E.N. for the use of the Presbyterian Church in Long Lane. In remembrance of God's wonderful mercies to her in a strange land – Boston N.E. Dec' ye 1, 1730"

<sup>3</sup> 1744-1809

<sup>4</sup> Charles Bullfinch designed Federal Street Church in 1809

<sup>5</sup> 1935 and 1941, respectively

<sup>6</sup> At James Freeman Clarke's suggestion, his parishioner, Julia Ward Howe, penned "the Battle Hymn of the Republic" (Dana McLean Greeley, *25 Beacon Street*, p.122)

<sup>7</sup> In 1853, Church of the Disciples merged with Indiana Place Chapel

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, p. 12

<sup>9</sup> Hendricks

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, p. 12

<sup>12</sup> Miss Bertha Langmaid, *A Brief History of Arlington Street Church*, 1/15/53

movement of the decade,"<sup>13</sup> from the institution of fire-brigades and small-pox vaccinations to the petitioning of the General Court of Massachusetts to abolish the slave trade.<sup>14</sup>

I should have covered the brief ministry of John Snelling Popkin, known to generations of Harvard Students who studied Greek with him<sup>15</sup> but deemed "too socially diffident for the ministerial office;"<sup>16</sup> and William Ellery Channing,<sup>17</sup> who claimed that religion is not only "a private, personal thing ... but a social principle;"<sup>18</sup> and Ezra Stiles Gannett, who, on Federal Street, in 1825, organized the American Unitarian Association,<sup>19</sup> and who, with Reverend Joseph Tuckerman, Father of Social Work, created the Benevolent Fraternity, now known to us as the Unitarian Universalist Urban ministry.

I should have covered the ministries of Ware, Herford, Cuckson, Frothingham, Eliot, Greeley, Mendelsohn, Imara, Carpenter, and that of their congregations, forward through the ages, right up to us. I should have covered our progression from Presbyterianism to Congregationalism<sup>20</sup> to Unitarianism<sup>21</sup> (including the lawsuit which went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1862, arguing that the land on Long Lane had been deeded to Presbyterians, not Unitarians, and that, therefore, Unitarians had no business worshipping there).

I should have covered our support for the Boston Tea Party<sup>22</sup> and the Revolutionary War and the Civil War; our opposition to the Mexican War, the Spanish-American War, the Vietnam War, and the recent wars in the Middle East; our work for abolition, women's suffrage, civil rights, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights, and our work for world peace.

I figured that I should have covered movements and moments both ghastly and glorious, but I had neglected to do the math, which is simply this: to cover the 274 years of Arlington Street history in 40 minutes would mean speaking for 8.76 seconds per year.

Alternatively, it occurred to me that a theme, or a through-line, might serve as the basis for choosing just a few of our stories, a small gathering of vignettes from the life of this congregation, gleaned from the mountains of historical materials so generously spoon-fed to me by Arlington Street's brilliant historian and archivist, Holly Hendricks, ably aided by Stanley Moss and Reverend Gene Navias, Carol Smith, Joan Goodwin, Reverend George Whitehouse, and our friend, Reverend Peter Richardson, author of *The*

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<sup>13</sup> Johnson, p. 18

<sup>14</sup> Rev. Belknap also founded the Massachusetts Historical Society (Holly Hendricks, editorial notes)

<sup>15</sup> Hendricks

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, p. 19

<sup>17</sup> Ordained and installed 6/1/1803

<sup>18</sup> Channing organized the Unitarian Sunday School Society in 1827

<sup>19</sup> 1825

<sup>20</sup> 1786

<sup>21</sup> 1815 – 1819 (the "Pamphlet Wars" were in 1815; the Baltimore sermon, 1819)

<sup>22</sup> 1773

*Boston Religion*. Someone suggested the theme *Sex and the City*,<sup>23</sup> which would certainly set us apart, once again, from the other downtown UU churches – as if we needed any more setting-apart! But more compelling is this congregation's unwavering passion for an almost-utopian vision of the urban church: a sanctuary for worship in a free faith, yes, but, above all, 274 years of dedication to service, justice, and peace.

With that in mind, now that you've had a taste of our earliest years, I'm going to bring on the feast that began 200 years ago.

William Ellery Channing was born in 1780, graduated from Harvard a mere 18 years later, and, five years after that, took up his ministry to this congregation, in which he and they flourished for 37 years.

Dr. Channing was five years old when King's Chapel revised its liturgy, eliminating the doctrine of the Trinity. For the next 50 years, the movement spread, separating the Congregational churches in New England into Trinitarian and Unitarian. In 1819, Dr. Channing preached at the Baltimore ordination of Jared Sparks; the sermon, defining "Unitarian Christianity," made him the Father of Unitarianism.

Throughout his life, though standing a mere five feet and often in poor health, Dr. Channing was regarded as a giant. "To the tolerance, culture, and high civic and private virtue that characterized the typical Unitarian of the time, Dr. Channing added an emotional and spiritual quality, and an interest in philosophy."<sup>24</sup> The central theme of his work and his life was "the dignity of human nature as created by a loving God, and the potential greatness of the human soul."<sup>25</sup>

In 1836, Dr. Channing spoke out on the issue of slavery with an essay that uplifted the struggling Abolitionist Movement in New England.<sup>26</sup> "The first question to be proposed by a rational being, " he began, "is not what is profitable, but what is Right." He had resisted this public stance "not because he had any doubts about the moral imperative of the issue," but because it would fracture his congregation and devastate its financial base: the merchant shippers among his flock who profited from southern slavery. And it did.<sup>27</sup>

"When his ministerial protégé, the brilliant young Charles Follen, died in a shipwreck in 1840, the deacons of Dr. Channing's church refused permission to hold a memorial service there because Mr. Follen was such a rabid abolitionist." Ralph Waldo Emerson advised his heartbroken friend to abandon the congregation at Federal Street,

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<sup>23</sup> a popular television program

<sup>24</sup> Internet Modern History Sourcebook

<sup>25</sup> Rev. Dr. Patrick T. O'Neill, "Channing's Church of Reluctant Radicals," 8/5/01

<sup>26</sup> "Slavery"

<sup>27</sup>In the 1840s, more than 80 Unitarian ministers appeared on a radical abolitionist petition featured on the front page of a Boston newspaper, when the cause was still not popular (Dana McLean Greely, *25 Beacon Street*, p. 110)

but Dr. Channing stood fast ... and conducted the memorial service during a regular Sunday service anyway.<sup>28</sup>

"Before his death, William Ellery Channing would go on to lend his leadership and his energies to virtually every major social justice movement of his day: abolition, women's rights, prison reform, peace,<sup>29</sup> temperance, and mental health reform all claimed his attention.

"The seat of religion is the heart," wrote Ezra Stiles Gannett, Dr. Channing's assistant and, later, his successor.<sup>30</sup> "Bigotry and intolerance are contrary to the spirit and declarations of the gospel. Love to God and love to man are the two great commandments."<sup>31</sup> Gannett was a man filled with love ... and not some small measure of religious fervor, which was occasionally displeasing to his colleagues and his congregation. "A friend [warned] him that he ranted: 'Your manner was so impassioned,' he said, 'you betrayed so much of self-control, as quite to take off the mind from the subject and fix it on the speaker.' Both Henry Ware and Dr. Channing hasten[ed] to tell him that in his absorption he [was] not aware of how long he [made] his prayers. And the sermons, too: 'You have always leaned to the danger of too great length,' [wrote] Dr. Channing. And again: 'Some of our friends spoke to me of your having preached a *long* sermon on a hot summer afternoon. I was sorry for you and your hearers."<sup>32</sup>

At the age of 39, Gannett suffered a stroke; after eight Sundays out of the pulpit, he returned without the use of his right leg. From that time, forward, he walked using two canes. "They became a part of him," wrote his son, William, "the signal to eye and ear, by which everyone knew 'Dr. Gannett' in Boston streets." We can only imagine the determination and the challenge with which he mounted the stairs to the high pulpit each week to deliver his sermon.<sup>33</sup>

Dr. Gannett was often criticized for not taking a stand for abolition. In fact, he thought war an evil even greater than slavery, and saw the Fugitive Slave Bill as the only measure that would keep the south from a fratricidal war against the north. Still, he called slavery a "sin," and when Anthony Burns, an escaped Virginia slave, was captured

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<sup>28</sup> Hendricks

<sup>29</sup> Joan Goodwin, re-enactment of Dr. Channing's ordination, performed at ASC during GA in Boston, 2003. Dr. Channing was thoroughly and uncompromisingly anti-war. During the War of 1812, he wrote, "I know that to many, war is a matter of course, that it seems to them a trifling affair to shed man's blood, to desolate fruitful regions, to scatter terror, want, and misery over once happy lands. But thank God! I speak to some not thus hardened by savage customs and the calculations of inhuman policy, and who regard an unjust and unnecessary war as concentrating the guilt of multiplied murders...." "In 1816, the Massachusetts Peace Society was founded in Dr. Channing's parsonage study. This was the first peace society in America, the child of Dr. Channing's faith."

<sup>30</sup> born 1801

<sup>31</sup> as quoted in William C. Gannett, *Ezra Stiles Gannett: Unitarian Minister in Boston, 1824-1871*, p. 31

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, p. 90

<sup>33</sup> The pulpit at Arlington Street Church was raised to its current height in the 1911 renovation; previously, it was several feet lower, and congregants couldn't hear as well (Hendricks, editorial notes)

and brought to trial in Boston, Dr. Gannett was heartbroken, expressing a desire to exchange places with the doomed young man.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, the most remarkable feature of Gannett's personality was his generosity. Again, from the memories of his son:

"More than once, he succeeded in sending the roast beef, whole and hot, from the table to some poor friend. Once, probably when conscience had been chiding the selfish extravagance of two courses at table while the poor were with him always, he requested that hasty pudding might be provided for an indefinite future. Three or four days passed, when, forgetful of their fate, he brought home with him to dinner some hungry ministers. They shared his pudding, – and saved his family: thenceforward he restricted his restrictions."<sup>35</sup>

His hospitality was unbounded. One summer, he brought an entire family right from steerage to stay in his home. "Unpaid rents, pawnbrokers' charges, family disputes, 'black Sarah's' funeral, all were brought to him...." On Thanksgiving Eve, he saw to it himself that turkeys were sent to neighbors in need. A friend tells of seeing him on a very slippery day, down by North Street, making his way with the two canes in one hand and a bowl of food in the other.<sup>36</sup>

In May of 1860, the cornerstone of Arlington Street Church, the first public building in Boston's newly-filled Back Bay, was laid. "We have come to what seems to be a desolate spot," said Dr. Gannett to his congregation. "But in a few years, it will be found to be the one best for us, and we hope to see other edifices near...." They had brought with them, he affirmed, "not the walls of the old edifice, but what is better – the unseen element of life which has invigorated them."

The church was dedicated in high spirits in 1861, but there followed twenty difficult years. The Civil War had broken out as the church was being built. Dr. Gannett was in poor health, and died ten years later; his successor, Dr. John Ware, had been a tireless leader in Sanitary Commission<sup>37</sup> efforts on behalf on the soldiers, but was also unwell, and died nine years into his tenure here. In 1881, the pulpit stood vacant for over a year. Finally, luck turned, and the young Dr. Brooke Herford, an Englishman,<sup>38</sup> was called. To Dr. Gannett's dismay, the congregation had grown steadily more liberal throughout his time; Dr. Herford's progressive thinking was perfect for his new congregation.

In most Boston churches – and Arlington Street was no exception – the pews were purchased as family real estate; an annual assessment, or pew-tax, provided much of the financial support for the church. Although anyone could join the congregation, only

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<sup>34</sup> Albert J. Von Frank, *The Trial of Anthony Burns*, p. 270 ff, and Hendricks

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p. 265

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, pp. 266-267

<sup>37</sup> During the war, the Sanitary Commission was the precursor of the Red Cross (Hendricks)

<sup>38</sup> The first member of the clergy since our Presbyterian days not trained at Harvard (Hendricks)

pew-owners were members of the voting corporation that controlled much of the life of the church.<sup>39</sup>

Dr. Herford drew large crowds, but there were not enough "free" seats; pews were empty, but visitors were forced to stand or sit on the pulpit stairs. In 1888, Dr. Herford appealed to the Proprietors to share their pews with the students and middle class people without the means to buy a pew – hardly riff-raff,<sup>40</sup> but the Proprietors were outraged. "The parish is not to be governed either by its pastor or its committees in the conduct and direction of its important affairs," wrote one. "...I do not admit to Dr. Herford's right to invite into my pew at any time a stranger.... This is a matter of private right, judgment, taste." Clearly, the congregation was no longer "the Church of the Strangers."

Dr. Herford was conciliatory, and pressed the matter no further. Instead, he created a Sunday afternoon Vespers service. The church was filled to overflowing, and the seats were entirely free.<sup>41</sup>

When Dr. Herford returned to his native England, he recommended as his successor a fellow Brit, one Dr. John Cuckson, who served here from 1892-1900. But he was no match for Dr. Herford's charisma; Dr. Cuckson was more a scholar than a pastor, and the congregation was not well pleased. His lack of popularity was not helped when Dr. Cuckson developed insomnia, and began to be incoherent in the pulpit and to fall asleep in public. Finally, the "gentlemen of the Prudential Committee" voted to let him go, with severance pay.<sup>42</sup>

Dan Cheever, the oldest member of Arlington Street today, was baptized by Paul Revere Frothingham, who served this church as its senior minister from 1900-1926. Dr. Frothingham married Anna Clapp, and, "due to their mutual interest in social reform, ... spent their honeymoon in Europe, studying reform movements and charities, settlement houses, trade unions, cooperatives, and profit-sharing plans." (*Hardly Sex and the City*) "A close friend observed at the time, 'Frothingham stepped out of the heart of aristocracy and went to laboring men. He got their point of view and went back and preached it.'"<sup>43</sup>

Before coming to Arlington Street, Dr. Frothingham served in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he was criticized for too much mission work among the city's destitute immigrants, and not enough attention to the privileged children of his congregation. In response, he preached, "I wish to remind you ... that a minister's interest must be properly centered wherever good is to be done."

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<sup>39</sup> Hendricks

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*

<sup>41</sup> "The Century and the Quest: Commemorating the Centennial Celebration of the Arlington Street church, Unitarian Universalist, Boston, Mass. 1861-1961"

<sup>42</sup> Hendricks

<sup>43</sup> Holly Hendricks, "Labor and Social Justice: What Can We Learn from Paul Revere Frothingham?" Arlington Street Church, 8/31/97

After his call to Arlington Street, he "strongly encouraged all members to actively participate in the church's missions" in the poorer neighborhoods of Boston,<sup>44</sup> including classes in cobbling, gardening, and singing. "In 1908, Dr. and Mrs. Frothingham personally led a contingent of church members in helping victims of the devastating Chelsea fire." Four years later, he wrote, "The church is asked to prove its effectiveness in social reform, and to take positive, active part in movements for the public good. It is not enough to emphasize the inspiration that it gives to individual members for a better life or higher thought. It is expected to throw its influence, as an institution, on the side of progressive legislation, while it champions social righteousness and civic betterment. Something larger doubtless can be done by our Church along such lines as these."

Dr. Frothingham was a visionary and a renowned fundraiser; our now-priceless Tiffany windows were installed during his tenure. After his untimely death, his successor, Dr. Samuel Eliot, resigned from the presidency of the American Unitarian Association at the age of 65 to serve at Arlington Street for nine years. He lacked Dr. Frothingham's dynamism, but his administrative skills set the church on a strong, lay-led course.

In 1927, Nicola Sacco, a shoemaker, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a fish peddler, were convicted of the 1920 murders of two men. Many critics believe that Mr. Sacco and Mr. Vanzetti were "martyrs in the class struggle, ... found guilty of radicalism rather than murder." The accused were both aliens – Italians! – atheists, conscientious objectors, and radicals. "Their conviction by a jury in the anti-red atmosphere of the time, despite serious flaws in the evidence, raises grave doubts about the fairness of the trial and the presiding judge," Webster Thayer of Arlington Street Church.<sup>45</sup>

There is no record of either Dr. Eliot's or his congregation's response to the conviction.

It was Dr. Eliot who suggested that a young man in the pulpit would attract the families the church needed to grow.<sup>46</sup> Dana McLean Greeley, a fifth-generation Unitarian, was born in 1908 on a Sunday morning at 11:00, the time he liked best.<sup>47</sup> He attended his first General Assembly – then called the May Meetings – as a youth delegate in 1926, and never missed one after that.<sup>48</sup> He loved Starr Island, where he and his extended family spent time each summer for many years. In 1935, at the tender age of 27, Dr. Greeley was called to serve the congregation at Arlington Street, where he – and they – thrived for 23 years.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Such as the North End (Hendricks)

<sup>45</sup> [www.garyrutledge.com/AmHistory/hist\\_articles/1920s\\_articles.htm](http://www.garyrutledge.com/AmHistory/hist_articles/1920s_articles.htm)

<sup>46</sup> Hendricks

<sup>47</sup> Greeley, *25 Beacon Street*, p. 22

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, p. 23

<sup>49</sup> By the time Rev. Dr. Dana McLean Greeley was installed here in 1935, pew sales had all but ceased, and the number of Proprietors had dwindled. Still, the church's affairs were theirs to determine; in 1953, Dr. Greeley led the movement to revise the charter of the church, requiring an act of the Massachusetts legislature, to include in the corporation "Proprietors and others." The governing board, known as the Prudential Committee, approved new members who were then elected to the corporation. This is the exactly same congregational governance by which we operate today.

Dr. Greeley's greatest passions were peace, civil rights, and interfaith cooperation. He was a pacifist and outspoken opponent of Vietnam. He believed that Dr. King was the "greatest religious prophet and social reformer" of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An official observer at Vatican II, he chaired the American delegation to the International Association for Religious Freedom. Optimistic and irrepressible, Dr. Greeley was, in every way, larger than life.<sup>50</sup> And in the interests of full disclosure, I should say that his devotion to no less than the healing of the world did not in any way diminish his attentions to one 13-year-old girl to whom he served as good father, pastor, and mentor in Concord, Massachusetts, where he spent the last 15 years of his life. It is among her greatest joys to honor his memory by standing in his pulpit here at Arlington Street ... every Sunday morning at 11:00.

From 1958-1961, Dr. Greeley served as the last president of the American Unitarian Association, and, from 1961-1969, as first president of the merged Unitarian Universalist Association. In 1959, Dr. Jack Mendelsohn was called to Arlington Street.<sup>51</sup>

Dr. Mendelsohn was our first avowedly humanist minister; the cross came down from behind the pulpit. His ministry, spanning the sixties, was profoundly shaped by two great social movements of the time: Civil rights, and the protest of the Vietnam War.

Many of you know the story of Arlington Street member, community minister Reverend James Reeb, who was murdered by white racists in Selma, Alabama, on Thursday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1965. Deeply moved by his death, President Johnson put the Voting Rights bill before a special session of Congress on the following Monday, and Reverend Reeb's martyrdom is credited with the passage of the Voting Rights Act.<sup>52</sup>

In 1968, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders published a report that concluded, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal." One month later, Dr. King was murdered<sup>53</sup>. The UUA wrestled mightily with its commitment to Black Empowerment. That same year, at the General Assembly in Cleveland, monies were appropriated to fund a Black Affairs Council "to improve the conditions of black UUs and black people in America;" in 1969, at the last General Assembly held here in Boston, the funding was rescinded. Dr. Mendelsohn addressed the gathering, expressing his grief at the Assembly's failure to act, and led a

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<sup>50</sup> According to Phyllis Rickter, the church school had an attendance of 250 children during this time (Hendricks)

<sup>51</sup> In Dr. Gannett's time, the church school was devoted to question and answer periods. "Question: How may we become righteous? Answer: "Through faith in Christ." One hundred years later, from a pamphlet printed early in Dr. Mendelsohn's ministry is this description of the church school: "Our church school has come a long way from the simple catechism of a century ago. We feel the religious education of our children is one of the most important functions of our church, and we seek to develop the spiritual resources of our youngsters.... A simple faith in Christ will not do. Today, we hope to equip our young people with the knowledge and deep spiritual insight to face with confidence and vigor the highly complex challenges of their times."

<sup>52</sup> 1965. Duncan Howlett, *No Greater Love: The James Reeb Story*, p. 224

<sup>53</sup> 4/4/68

march, later known as "the walkout," from the General Assembly here to Arlington Street. Over 400 people joined him – all of them white.

The story less well told is that of the *What If They Gave a War and Nobody Came?* draft card turn-in and burning on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1967. In his sermon given on the following Sunday, Jack Mendelsohn said, "A hue and cry has arisen over the 60 young men who burned their draft cards in the chancel of Arlington Street Church.... It may come as surprising news to some," he continued, "that I react very negatively to the burning of draft cards. It is too flamboyant for my taste, too theatrical, too self-indulgent.... But ... I did not forbid it, and under similar circumstances, I would not again.... Indeed, the relatively few who burned their draft cards did so with such dignity and solemnity, I was almost converted.... The action of the others, the great majority, was truly awe-inspiring. One by one, some 280 of them walked up and handed their draft cards to four clergymen and a non-religious philosophy professor in the chancel.

"The clergymen who accepted the cards – Catholic priest Father Robert Cunnane, Yale Chaplain William Sloane Coffin, Harvard Divinity School professor George Williams, and myself – did so in full knowledge that by this symbolic act of solidarity with the students we, too, were assuming the risks of civil disobedience. The cards have since been deposited at the Justice Department so that the names of all who participated are known to the authorities, to do with them as they will. And I must make the point.... The cards of the burners were not carried to Washington for the obvious reason that they couldn't be. In terms of putting a life on the line, it was not the burners who made the more passionate gesture; it was the others."

Dr. Mendelsohn concluded his sermon with these prophetic and haunting words: "When an issue of this magnitude is joined, when there are those who, having exhausted without effect every lawful means of opposing the monstrous crimes being committed in their name by their government, who cannot accept silence or inaction, and choose instead the Gethsemene of civil disobedience, how is the church to respond? That was the question posed to this church. You know how it was answered last Monday. But the continuing answer, the one that really counts, is yours."<sup>54</sup>

In 1969, Arlington Street's Robert Hohler worked to form Fellowship for Renewal in support of Black Empowerment. In 1970, the Samaritans, a suicide prevention center, was founded here at Arlington Street<sup>55</sup>, and Sandy Latner opened the Freedom Center, offering draft counseling and selling posters, bumper stickers, and buttons to raise funds to support Black Empowerment and other progressive causes. In 1971, ASC's steeple bells first rang out for the gay pride parade as it passed by on Boylston Street far below, as they do to this day. And in 1972, the ASC Women's Caucus was organized; on Mother's Day, 1973, the service opened with a large procession of women, singing

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<sup>54</sup> "The Church and the Draft Resisters, " 10/22/67. In 1968, sanctuary was granted at ASC to two draft resisters, which resulted in the cancellation of the church's insurance. "Night Watch" was instituted; the building was attended by member volunteers 24 hours a day for the next two and a half years.

<sup>55</sup> Founded in England by Monica Dickens; ASC was its first site in the United States

Carolyn McDade's *We Might Come In A-Fighting* and wearing signs on their backs that said *Bitch*.<sup>56</sup>

But Dr. Mendelsohn's ministry was followed by what is widely described as a disaster. The ministerial search committee chose Renford Gaines, an African American, yet despite the congregation's commitment to furthering the cause of racial equality, their call was decidedly unenthusiastic at a mere 59 percent voting "yes." Dr. Gaines came reluctantly, and the lack of enthusiasm changed to outright hostility from both pulpit and pew. Four years later, having changed his name to Mwalimu Imara, he was gone, as was much of the once-robust congregation. No one can really account for this abject failure; perhaps only the perspective of time will tell.<sup>57</sup>

After two years of ministry to and among themselves<sup>58</sup> – a difficult time, but not unhappily recalled by those of the "saving remnant" who made the passage – the congregation welcomed Dr. Victor Carpenter, who stayed for ten robust years of growth and activism. Many of us know and love Victor; my first memory of him is from the very early 1980's, when I was a graduate student here in Boston. I first spotted him in Post Office Square, dressed in full and glorious preaching robes, at a protest against South Africa's apartheid government. As the crowd sang freedom songs, he was arrested for civil disobedience.

Dr. Carpenter was and is an eloquent champion of disability and accessibility rights, and, during his ministry, many marginalized people found a home here. Sanctuary was provided to a Central American refugee, as part of the larger Sanctuary movement;<sup>59</sup> gay rights groups flocked to meet at Arlington Street, including Daughters of Bilitis, the Homophile Union, the Metropolitan Community Church, and Dignity, the gay Catholic group;<sup>60</sup> and, in conjunction with Dignity, our Friday Night Supper program was begun<sup>61</sup> by Peter Thoms, my classmate at Harvard Divinity School, and continues to this day: 23 years of feeding our hungry and homeless neighbors.

In 1978, on the December Sunday after Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk were memorialized in an interfaith service in this sanctuary, a holiday service was given by Arlington Street members of Boston UU Gays and Lesbians (BUUGL). Their opening statement quoted the message Harvey Milk had recorded to be played to gay people in the event of his murder in office; he said, "I can only hope that they'll turn that anger and frustration and madness into something positive.... I hope that every gay would just say, 'ENOUGH,' come forward, and tell everybody, wear a sign, let the world know. Maybe that will help."

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<sup>56</sup> from the galleys of Rev. Peter Richardson's *The Boston Religion*, p.25. Both the 1972 and 1973 events happened during Rev. Imara's ministry.

<sup>57</sup> In 1974, Boston school desegregation was ordered by the federal government.

<sup>58</sup> 1974-1976

<sup>59</sup> In January 1987, the church was broken into and files rifled (probably by the FBI), following Rev. Carpenter's sermon declaring ASC's commitment to Sanctuary

<sup>60</sup> 1977

<sup>61</sup> 1984

BUUGL decided to do just that. Five brave souls, including Rev. Gene Navias, who, years later, would become our associate minister, stood in this pulpit, came out as gay or lesbian, and told the truth of their lives, hoping, they said, to serve "the causes of liberation for which this church has so long and so proudly stood."<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps the BUUGL service was portentous. Dr. Farley Wheelwright served well as interim minister for a year in Reverend Carpenter's wake, and then a very strange thing happened: in 1989, a young lesbian mother was called out of a ministry in the epicenter of the AIDS pandemic in Provincetown, Massachusetts to this pulpit. Her mentor, Dr. Greeley, had described the Arlington Street Church of his time as "inclusive of, or divided between, liberals and conservatives."<sup>63</sup> But by the time I arrived here, understandably, the conservatives were all but gone.

Nonetheless, we cherish our diversity. We house Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step addiction recovery meetings, and our own programs include a Buddhist reading group, the Arlington Street Zen Center, an enthusiastic Young Adult group, and an occasional gathering of ASC's Latino members, called *La Familia*. Ten years ago, ASC member George Leger traveled to Guatemala City and began work with street children there; today, we consider him to be our first missionary. And this past spring, we conducted an investiture for Dr. Wendy Weiger, a naturalist and writer who is establishing a retreat in the North Woods of Maine; Dr. Weiger is our first monastic.

I didn't arrive at ASC with an Edifice Complex, but one journalist had referred to the sanctuary as having a "prayed-in look," and another dubbed us "the Divine Dump;" from steeple to parish hall, the building was, indeed, falling to ruin. Dr. Greeley's wife, Debby, told me she had sat for 23 years looking up at the broken flower petal at the top of the Corinthian column to the right of the pulpit; she gave generously, as did so many, to the sanctuary renovation fund, and although she did not live to see it completed, the flower, now whole again, is wholly hers.<sup>64</sup>

In 1989, Faith Greeley Scovel, Debby and Dr. Greeley's oldest daughter and wife of Dr. Carl Scovel, then minister at King's Chapel, hosted a party to welcome me to Boston. Guests included members of the staffs and governing boards of King's Chapel, First and Second Church, and Arlington Street. Dr. Rhys Williams, then minister at First and Second, was asked to say grace before the generous spread. He thanked God for the steadfast traditionalism of King's Chapel, for First and Second's commitment to the middle of the road, and for the activist spirit of Arlington Street. It was a wonderful blessing.

And while our sanctuary campaign was not the sanctuary movement of a few years earlier, we have had other progressive causes to support. Most dramatically, when two women were murdered at reproductive health clinics in a Boston suburb in December

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<sup>62</sup> 12/10/78

<sup>63</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 33

<sup>64</sup> The sanctuary was closed for renovations in the summer of 2001, and reopened on September 9, 2001, two days before the terrorist attacks.

of 1994, we memorialized them here at Arlington Street, and the next month, after an overflow crowd gathered here to recognize the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the church received bomb threats. *In the Best Interests of the Children*, an organization for families affected by HIV and AIDS, was founded here, as was *The Shared Heart*, a traveling photo exhibit (and later a book) of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth, designed to support the Massachusetts Safe Schools Initiative. Arlington Street is also a founding member of the Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry.

As always, the church is both a reflection of and a response to the world around it; today, our mission states that we are "gathered in love and service for justice and peace." The congregation is vibrant and welcoming. Especially in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, we seek to lift a passionate and articulate voice for interfaith understanding and cooperation amidst the hate-filled voices of fundamentalism. Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Jewish, and Pagan elements are included in our worship.

There is so much more to say, my friends – so much that had to be omitted in the interests of time – and I'm afraid I've already gone on much too long. I thank you for your kind listening, and, in blessing, leave you with these words from Dr. Greeley's favorite hymn:

Forward through the ages, in unbroken line,  
Move the faithful spirits at the call divine;  
Gifts in differing measure, hearts of one accord,  
Manifold the service, one the sure reward

Wider grows the vision, realm of love and light;  
For it we must labor 'til our faith is sight.  
Prophets have proclaimed it, martyrs testified,  
Poets sung its glory, heroes for it died.

Not alone we conquer, not alone we fall,  
In each loss or triumph, lose or triumph all.  
Bound by God's far purpose in one living whole  
Move we on together to the shining goal.

