

## Church of the Disciples

At one point in 1839, Clarke put pen to paper in a pro and con exercise as to whether or not he should stay with the Louisville congregation he had served since 1833:

What reasons are there for supposing that I am doing good here?

1. The society has increased slowly and is increasing
2. There are many in it who are warmly attached to me
3. Prejudice has been done away [with] among the sects.
4. There is an increasing spirit of religious interest and the church is increasing.

What reasons are there for doubting whether I am doing much good?

1. There have been difficulties for the last two or three years & dissatisfaction.
2. There has been more difficulty in raising money than previously, & many who formerly gave now refuse to give.
3. Few pews sold or rented, and the increase very slow of the congregation.
4. Dislike expressed to my manner—to my not visiting enough—to my going away every year, editing messenger, etc., etc.

I am doing some good, but not unmixed. (MS entitled "Considerations on Leaving the Louisville Church, In Colville, p. 83)

He shared these pro and con sentiments with his fiancée, Anna Huidekoper and her father Harm Jan of Meadville, PA, and they encouraged him to stay on at least for another year, asserting that he would confront a few discontents in any congregation he might serve. So he decided to stay on. After Anna joined him as his new wife, however, he became convinced that a return to Boston would be best, so in February of 1840 he resigned, requesting to leave by May 1 but offering to stay until the congregation found a successor. The second week in June he finally left to join Anna in her native Meadville, Pa. After a few months in Meadville he was off to Boston to seek a congregation. He felt that there might be an opportunity to get the Waltham congregation or possibly George Ripley's church as he was going to leave his church in January. When it looked as if these two possibilities were not going to work out he returned to Meadville. Shortly before his return his wife had given birth to their first child, Herman

Upon reflection he determined that perhaps the best plan would be to start his own congregation in Boston despite the fact that there were already 12 Unitarian Churches there. Of those 12 it is interesting to note, four had disappeared by 1876, leaving no trace behind. "Two others have been sold and rebuilt in a different place, with such heavy debts on both that one of them was lost to the society, and the other may be." *Difficulties and Advantages*, 109) In January 7, 1841, he wrote to his sister Sarah these words. "I agree with those who think it a good time to form a new congregation in Boston., If a dozen men can be found, to hire a hall for three months, I will give my services for that time without compensation.

"My object would be, not to form a congregation of Unitarians, but a church of Christ. The church—church union, church action, church edification—would be the main thing. Churches have usually been built on coincidence of opinion; those who thought alike on doctrinal Christianity have united together. This church should be built on coincidence of practical purpose. Those who intend to do the same things would unite in it. Our desire would be to help each other to deep and distinct convictions of truth by preaching, Bible classes, conversational meetings, Sunday schools, etc., to warm each other's hearts, and fill them with love by social religious meetings, prayer meetings, and the Lord's Supper; and finally, to help one another to habits of active goodness, for which purpose we would agree as a church, to devote thought, time, and money to the relief of the poor, to doing away with social abuses, to spreading around us the light and joy of religion. We may have committees on temperance, prisons, the poor, slaves, etc., which from time to time shall report to the whole church,. Believing that Jesus intended to found such a church as this, we take him for our Head; he is our Master, Teacher, and Saviour; our Prophet, Priest, and King. All those who join the church express this faith in Jesus. (*Hale*, 155, 156)

In line with this intent, he took his first steps toward the end of January of 1841, engaging the Swedenborgian Chapel, opposite the Stone Church of his youth on Tremont Street. For three evenings at which he delivered three sermons on his views of religion hoping that these would elicit enough interest to organize a congregation. On all three occasions, the chapel was full . From those present and also from a group of malcontents from other congregations that had been meeting in private homes a nucleus was formed to begin Sunday services in a part of Armory Hall which seated 275 people. On the first Sunday morning the hall was crowded to the point that some people had to be turned away. In the evening it was comfortably full. (*Bolster*, 143). The whole Hall was rented in subsequent weeks to accommodate all of the people. On April 27, 46 charter members signed the congregation's membership book underneath their pledge of union: "Our faith is in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and we do hereby unite ourselves into a Church of the Disciples, that we may co-operate together in the study and practice of Christianity." (*Bolster*, 144). Clarke believed that history demonstrated that by

far the best unifying force in a religious group was generated by allegiance to a great religious prophet. As he phrased it, "Ideas embodied in a person makes a better basis of union than ideas embodied in a creed. Interestingly, William Ellery Channing suggested that the phrase identifying Jesus would be ""the divinely appointed teacher of truth," rather than the more orthodox sounding "Christ the Son of God, but Clarke wanted an ascription which would link him with the early Church. In the first year an additional one hundred and one people joined, thirty two the following year and an additional 58 by April of 1845, bringing the total after normal attrition to 200 members. Many more people attended the services. To accommodate the increased attendance, services were moved to the Masonic Temple. At the start of 1845, regular attendance averaged around 700.

This is a remarkable story of the successful start of a new congregation. The central feature of their covenant was "faith in Jesus as the Christ." "All who join the church have this faith to begin with. They have confidence that in some way or other, Jesus has power to save those who follow him. They confide in Jesus as their spiritual friend and Savior, who can bring them to God. As to the way in which he accomplishes this, they may differ. One may think he saves us by his death; another by his life; another, by his example and teaching; another may not have any distinct belief upon the subject. But all may still have one and the same faith, faith namely in Christ himself, who in one way or another can save those who love him and obey him. They may differ as to their opinions about his nature. One may think that he is very God; another, that he is a superhuman being made before all words; another that he was a man, made in all respects like his brethren. Yet, as God, archangel or man, all are ready to confide in his power, believe his teachings, obey his commands, and reverence his character. Their belief concerning Christ is very different, but their faith in Christ is the same. (Principles, 12)

The best possible test for membership is this "Are you willing to work with us? Are you willing to unite with us in our various meetings/ to help us and to be helped by us/ to place confidence in us and let us place confidence in you? Are you willing to tell us our faults when we do wrong, and be told of yours when you are in the wrong? Are you willing to labor with us for the progress of Christianity, of pure piety, of human happiness, and peace and liberty, and temperance?" This would be a much better test, with which to try the spirit of one who proposed entering the church, than to ask him to sign a long and minute creed, or to relate his religious experience and tell the story of his conversion.

The faith doesn't stop in itself, but issues forth in work. The early church gathered together for "prayer, and praise, and mutual exhortation but did not open up churches and meeting houses for public worship. "Their work was to cooperate together in the study and practice of Christianity—to work together in spreading the knowledge of the gospel wherever they could find men willing to listen to it, and in doing s good to one another and to all who needed it." (Principles, 15)

. In addition to the covenant, Clarke from the inception of the church enunciated three principles to guide them—the social principle, the voluntary principle, and the principle of congregational participation in worship.

With this as background, the first overall principle he called the social principle. In order to cooperate as called for in their covenant, they would have to know each other well and only coming together for worship on Sunday mornings would not enable this. So he designed other sorts of social gatherings to engage the three elements of human nature—intellect, affection, and will or as he also phrased it “head, heart, and hand.

The basis for the intellectual element he described as follows: :”The union of many minds in the earnest investigation of truth, will produce deeper and broader results, than the solitary efforts of any individual mind, no matter how superior he is to each of them. The only way in which every side of a truth can be seen, is in the combined investigations of many different intellects. Their varied tendencies of thought, their diverse experience, modify and correct all individual onesidedness and eccentricity.” (Principles, p. 19) Every other Wednesday evening there was a discussion to engage the intellect. Clarke would often begin with a brief introduction of the topic. The list of topics during the winter of 1845-46 included the following:

1. What is the true Christian doctrine of regeneration?
2. “There is no instinctive, intuitive, or direct knowledge of the truths of religion, either of the being of God or of our own immortality.”—Andrews Norton
3. What is the inspiration of the New Testament?
4. Is sin a negative or a positive evil?
5. “Be ye perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect” Is this to be understood and obeyed in a literal or a limited sense?
6. What is the New Testament doctrine of the hidden life?
7. Shall we maintain and urge our opinions always, or sometimes concede for the sake of union?
8. Should the good withdraw from an evil community, or separate themselves from an evil man?
9. What is the sphere of woman, and how shall she be best educated to fill it?
10. What is the Christian idea of the future state, and of the spiritual world?
11. What is the doctrine of Scripture with regard to eternal punishment, and what is the Christian view of future retribution?
12. What views do the Scriptures afford us of a spiritual body?
13. What are the principles and ideas peculiar to Protestantism, as distinguished from those peculiar to the Church of Rome?
14. What is needed by Unitarianism, at the present time, to give it greater influence and success?(Hale, p. 164)(Also Bolster thesis, 273)

This principle is also seen in lectures which were given in the church proper on Sunday evenings. The proposed lineup for the lecture series in 1848 included Temperance Reform (S.H. Chapin), The Peace Movement (Theodore Parker), the Anti-Slavery Movement (Wendell Phillips), and Education Reform (Horace Mann). (Hale 167-168 from Clarke’s diary, March 15, 1848).

Another regularly- held gathering

Every other Wednesday evening they held meetings at the church, not principally for discussion of a topic of interest but rather “for the expression of devout thought and religious affections.” Here heart meets with heart, as there mind with mind. At these prayer meetings, and conference meetings, where we endeavor to speak from our inward experience, rather than from our reflections, a holy influence often seems to extend itself, as one speaker after another, in a few simple words, unfolds his deep convictions and trials, joys, and hopes. (Principles, 19) This involved sharing of religious faith. Of this Clarke said: “But faith must rest on something deeper than reasoning, which is always uncertain, namely on insight. We have faith in that which we have seen and known from inward spiritual experience” (Principles, 11).

Also under the general area of the social principle engaging intellect and emotion, head and heart were the Bible study groups which were held over the years. Clarke often mentions going to the Bible class. It seems that at times to lead them but more often was a participant. At one point he mentions that John Albion Andres was leading the class. Clarke published a series of papers, entitled “Deacon Herbert’s Bible-class” for Henry Whitney Bellows Christian Inquirer and they were put together in book form two years after his death. This constitutes some of Clarke’s best writing, I believe. The series featured a cast of fictional characters, led by Deacon Herbert discussing topics such as “The Way We Helped our Minister to Write Good Sermons,” “The Aim of Life,” Nicodemus and the New Birth,” “Miracles,” The Twelve,” and “The Sermon on the Mount.”

Each participant puts forward a particular point of view, which is then countered by the others who have a little different approach to the issue based on their thinking or experience. It is very much a Hegelian thesis, antithesis, synthesis approach to deliberation. Both the Deacon as leader and the minister as participant learn from this “polylogue.” It is a very interesting and entertaining way in which to elucidate a subject and very much demonstrated Clarke’s approach to learning. Everyone had something to offer and enriched the understanding of the group.

For instance, in a discussion of the “Aim of life,” Miss Alton sums up the position of all the participants in this manner: “We want some rule which shall give us all sides. We need an idea of life which shall make us actively useful to others, which shall lead us constantly to improve ourselves, which shall insure the salvation of the soul, which shall make us faithful to the nearest duty, yet enlarge our heart till it sympathizes with the interests of our whole race. We need an idea which shall not tend to shallowness, to selfishness, or to narrowness. But is there any rule so comprehensive, and at the same time practical and capable of being applied to the details of every-day life?” Herbert, 31)

Mr. Warland then steps in with the answer that the comprehensive rule involved is advancing the Kingdom of God upon the earth. Mr. Warland—“It is evident that Christians are to make it their aim to cause God’s kingdom to come, and his will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven. ‘They kingdom come’ is the central petition of the Christian’s daily prayer, and should be the main desire of his heart. To work for this coming of God’s kingdom may perhaps satisfy all the conditions we have affixed to the aim of life. We are to advance the kingdom of God by bearing witness to its truth in word, action, and life. The end is a generous one. It is to do the highest good to others; and, in doing them

the highest good, we must also do them all lower good,--as Jesus healed men's bodies that he might heal their souls, too. But to do this work requires constant self-culture also. For we are to bear witness to the turn, and therefore must know it. We are to bear witness in life, and therefore must make our life noble. This aim avoids narrowness; for Christ's work was to save all mankind, and so we must take an interest in the whole human race." (33)

A third class of meetings designed to enable the exercise of the will involved a more practical effort. Women of the church met on two afternoons every week during the winter "to cut out and give out work to poor women, who are thus assisted to clothe their children, as they are paid for their work in comfortable clothing which they could not otherwise procure for a much greater amount of labor." (Principles, 19) The money from collections on Communion Sundays, the first Sunday of each month, enabled the purchase of yarn and material which the poor woman used to knit and sew. About 60 women were regularly helped. Most of the women were Roman Catholic Irish whose husbands were unemployed or underemployed. (Bolster, 148).

The discussion meetings and lectures also led to exercise of the will benevolent programs such as the founding of a temporary home for the destitute, the establishment of a retirement home for African American women who had worked as domestics, a home for pregnant unmarried women, The congregation strongly supported the Emigrant Aid society which encouraged anti-slavery New Englanders to go to Kansas and settle there so when the time came for an election as to whether the state would be slave or free under the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the majority of the population would be against slavery. In 1856 members of the Disciple Church gave over \$1,500 (\$36,200 in today's dollars) to the effort and in the fall of 1856 they began a clothing drive and were able to ship "29 cases containing 4200 garments, 15 cases of boots, 5 cases of blankets."

The disciples were also very active in the work of the New England Educational Commission to provide schools and teachers for the children of former slaves working on former plantations on the Sea Islands off the Carolinas. One collection in 1863 provided \$1200 (\$21,000) and later \$475 was sent. In 1864 they made a commitment to supporting a freedmen's school that was organized apart from the New England Educational Commission, named the Whitney by agreeing to supply the salary of an assistant teacher, which cost about \$450 a year. ) Contributions were made to the "Boston Port Society to support Father Taylor's ministry to seamen. (Bolster, 275 and Bolster Thesis, 273)

The congregation all provide, significant support for the New England Hospital for Women and Children. The congregation supplied an endowment which would support a free bed for a year, a large supply of linen, and many hours of volunteer labor. By the 1880's they were giving \$4,000 yearly to charity which was in addition to the gift of many goods and personal services. (Bolster, p. 301). This was approximately one-third of their total budget.

At times political action was taken by the church as when it sent a protest to Congress against the Mexican War and when it published widely distributed tracts against the annexation of Texas.

At the arrest of John Brown after the Harper's Ferry raid, the church raised several hundred dollars for his legal defense.

One of Clarke's most impassioned sermons was delivered on June 4, 1854, after the rendition of Anthony Burns, a black man to a slave owner under the Fugitive Slave Law. The Boston community was outraged and large crowds of people voiced their displeasure as he was marched through the streets of Boston to a ship to be taken away. (Bolster, 236).

Clarke decried as unconstitutional the decision of the United States Commissioner Edward Greeley Loring to return Burns to the South, claiming that the due process was not followed in that the Constitution states that in "suits of common law where the value of the controversy shall exceed \$20.00 the right of a trial by jury shall be preserved." Burns was a free citizen of the state of Massachusetts before he came before the magistrate and by means of a piece of paper brought from the south was bound over into servitude. There was not jury trial to ascertain the truth of the claim.

Clarke claimed that no citizen in Massachusetts was safe from this unconstitutional exercise of power by an officer of the federal government.,

He called upon the Commissioner to resign and for those in his congregation to support only those for any public office who were in favor of the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law, the right of trial by jury for fugitive slaves if the entire law was not repealed, the exclusion of slavery from the territories, the admission of no more slave states, and the abolition of the Union if these cannot be obtained. It is important to note that Clarke later changed his mind on this last demand. (The Rendition of Anthony Burns: Its Causes and Consequences, A discourse on Christian Politics, Williams Hall, Boston, June 4, 1854.

In sermons in 1872 entitled *The Crusade against the Chinese* and in 1878, entitled "The Brotherhood of Man", he criticized the exclusion of Chinese immigration. Both of these sermons gained wider circulation by being reprinted in the *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*. (Bolster theses, 569.)

The second overall principle was the voluntary principle which read "The expenses of the church shall be defrayed by a voluntary subscription, and pews shall not be sold, rented, or taxed." (Principles, 21). Selling or renting of pews was the way Unitarian churches were commonly financed. To Clarke's thinking this tended to be undemocratic and un-Christian because it vested control of the congregation in those who had financial means, shutting out the poor. It was an impractical system, he contended, because the well-to-do often did not attend services and those of limited financial means often did not attend for fear of trespassing on the property of others. In *Common Sense in Religion*, he carries on an imaginary conversation with a Buddhist who expresses his puzzlement over the pew rental and sale system in the U.S. "But are they {the rich} the only

ones who need religion? What becomes of all those who have no money? You have schools for everyone, rich or poor, schools free to all. Poor children, in your country, can learn to read and write. Is it not as important for them to learn to love God and man? You keep everyone from working on Sunday, rich and poor, I should think you would have churches open for them all.: (Clarke, 1874, PP. 263-264).

Another difficulty Clarke pointed out is that pew owners may not necessarily be “the friends of Christian and humane movements.” (Principles, 22). “One is a distiller or a retailer of ardent spirits, and he does not like to hear anything said strongly about Temperance. Another owns a plantation in Cuba, or has security on Negroes in New Orleans. Another is a Captain or Colonel in the militia, and does not approve of ultraism in the cause of Peace. Another is a good, easy man,. Who means to enjoy life, and does not like to hear too much said about Eternity, Judgment and Retribution. They consult together and find that they compose a majority of the pew holders; the church belongs to them; what right has the minister to use their church to say things which they disapprove.”

He considered a more common situation to be one in which a pew holder is dissatisfied with the minister and censures, criticizes, or ridicules the minister’s sermons but feels he must continue be a member of the congregation because he has a significant investment in his pew which he cannot sell except at some loss. So, rather, than sacrificing his money, he sacrifices his soul in maintaining his ownership.

In many congregations pew holders essentially governed the congregation. Clarke thought it important to have a single organization united on a religious basis, which controls all the affairs, spiritual and financial. (Clarke, *The Pew System and the Free System*, 1876). Standing committees included A Pastoral Committee, A Committee on Benevolent Action, A Committee on the Young, a Committee on Music, and A Committee on Finance. It is interesting to note that the bylaws called for the Pastor to be a member of all of the committees except the finance committee and that the Pastoral Committee which dealt with the religious interests of the church was to be composed of five men and five women. The benevolence committee was to be composed of six men and six women. There was no mention of the women/men ratio in the committee on the young. The Finance committee was to consist of six gentlemen charged with handling the business aspects of the church. ( *Service Book for the Use of the Church of the Disciples*, pp. 178-179)

At the dedication of the church’s first building in 1848, Clarke spoke these words: “And now we enter to-day into this new house, which is to be our home. It’s simple but harmonious forms, its cheerful seriousness of character, harmonize well with our views of the nature of the religion which we wish here to study together. We wish and intend that these doors may be always open to welcome the stranger, the feeble, and the wretched. We wish and intend that here the rich and the poor may sit together, and the differences of rank and caste be forgotten. We wish that the fugitive slave, and the penitent prodigal may here feel themselves welcome, as they always have been. We have always rejoiced in open doors, in free seats, in having a Church composed not of the rich but of the poor as well. We shall sell no pews, not put it into the power of any body of



pew-holders to control the religious action of the Church. This Church has been built by the free and generous offerings of its members, who gave, hoping for nothing again, except the pleasure of knowing that they were providing for the accommodation of others as well as for their own. (Church as it was, 29)

Thus, the congregation relied on voluntary contributions of members. In 1844, their third year, 152 of them gave \$1727. This paid Clarke's salary of \$1,000, (\$23,271 in today's, dollars) rent of \$170 per quarter for their use of the Masonic Temple, and little bit left over for contingencies and incidental expenses. Clarke's \$1,000 salary was supplemented by a \$1,000 annual gift from his father-in-law Harm Jan Huidekoper. In 1844 he made an gift to \$20,000 (4465, 428) to Anna, followed by gifts in years to come so that by 1849 James and Anna had over \$40,000 in investments, the income from which allowed them to lived quite comfortably. By 1855, they had \$71, 300 invested, bringing in more than \$5,000 a year in dividends and interest. They were able to employ two maids (\$2.00 each per week), and a handyman who did regular chores for \$1.75 per month. A governess for their children was paid \$6.00 per week. Financial security enabled Clarke to give full attention to his fledging congregation. (Bolster, )

His salary did grow to \$5,000 by 1873 (equivalent to \$86,000 today).

A third principle was that of congregational worship. Conventionally in Unitarian congregations, lay people took no part in worship. Professional musicians provided organ and choir music. There was no congregational hymn singing. The minister read the Scriptures, recited the prayers, and preached the sermon. Clarke instituted congregational hymn singing (actually produced his own hymnal), responsive reading of the Psalms, corporate recitation of the Lord's Prayer, and a time of meditative silence and an extempore ministerial prayer after the sermon. Communion on the first Sunday of the month was open to all present. Clarke hoped to develop a tradition of lay preaching, but was not successful in getting too many lay takers except for a few notable exceptions, such as Julia Ward Howe, and John Albion Andrew, wartime governor of Massachusetts. Occasionally, the sermon would be dispensed with and short affirmations given by members.

Of the singing, Clarke wrote: "The singing by the whole congregation is often very sweet and touching. The united tones of several hundred singing the praises of God in company, gives a feeling of reality to worship, not otherwise attained. It is desirable, when the singing is thus congregational, that there should be an experienced chorister to lead it, a man of musical taste and religious feeling, with a good voice and judgment in selecting tunes. It is also desirable that there should be regular singing meetings, to be attended by as many of the society as possible, to practice tunes, and thus improve the music continually." (Principles, 26)

Clarke established an eclectic liturgical calendar of special days dedicated to commemoration of such events as the births of Swedenborg, Washington, and William Ellery Channing, the deaths of Joan of Arc and John Brown and to such events as the laying of the Atlantic Cable and the Hegira of

Mohammed. Forefather's Day (December 22) commemorated the landing of the pilgrims and the Reformation was commemorated on the Sunday closes to Oct. 31. (Hutchinson, 150).

The Church of the Disciples, by Clarke's own admission was initially composed of malcontents from other Unitarian Churches who were dissatisfied with their experience in existing churches. Some wanted more zealous congregational social action, some wanted more orthodox preaching and doctrine, some wanted more freedom of thought and action, and some wanted the congregation to be more involved in more interesting, inspiring worship. Some were half orthodox in their belief and others felt that so-called liberal Christianity was not liberal enough for them. (Principles, 31)

Many of the established Unitarian clergymen in Boston looked upon Clarke as a "disturber and Innovator," who led a "Caryall Church", a collection of Radical Reformers, Come-Outers and Transcendentalists of every sort. They criticized him publicly for his free pew system, his congregational organization, his permission of lay preaching, and his allowance of anyone who was a self-described follower of Jesus to partake in Communion even though they were not members of his congregation or any congregation. (Bolster thesis from Barthol, Sermon Tribute to James Freeman Clarke; James Freeman Clarke, "Letter to a Religious Society Destitute of a Pastor")

It was widely predicted in Boston that the new congregation would soon fall apart because of such divergent expectations. But such was not the case, claimed Clarke, because there was "a common longing for spiritual life as the highest aim.... We escaped discord on the one hand, and monotony on the other, and our varieties were blended into a happy concord." (Principles, 31).

There was one occasion, however, when there was a major conflict within the congregation. It was precipitated by a proposed pulpit exchange between Clarke and Theodore Parker, Unitarian minister in West Roxbury. In 1841, Parker had created a buzz among Boston Unitarians by preaching a sermon at the ordination of Charles C Shackford entitled "The Transient and the Permanent in Christianity." In the former category he placed church rituals and theological doctrines such as the authority of the Bible, and the supernatural authority of Jesus. In the latter category he placed "absolute pure morality, absolute pure religion, the love of man; the love of God acting without let or hindrance." (in Bolster 149 Theodore Parker, "The Transient and the Permanent in Christianity," in Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalist*, 260ff).

This was highly offensive to many Unitarians who thought Parker had put Jesus in the same category as other teachers and reformers and that there was nothing particularly authoritative in his teaching. All in all Parker became persona non grata among respectable Boston society. Almost all Boston Unitarian clergy refused to exchange pulpits with him. Many questioned his being a Christian

Clarke had agreed to exchange pulpits with Parker the next Sunday. Several of his church members asked him to cancel the exchange, but he politely refused to do so, adding that he would explain the reasons for his refusal at a church meeting to be held during the week following the exchange.

At the meeting Clarke told his parishioners that he did not agree with many of Parker's views, but that theological disagreement alone was no reason to bar a minister from a Unitarian pulpit in that intellectual belief did not constitute the core of Christianity. Clarke quoted Jesus as saying "Whosoever wishes to do the will of God, the same is my brother." Parker was one who wished to do the will of God, and therefore he was within the Christian fold. He contended that heresy was never put down by exclusion and that a free exchange of ideas was the proper way to deal with such differences. Besides, Parker may have come upon a new truth.

The congregation accepted Clarke's rationale and the issue was dead until another exchange was arranged in August of 1842. The issue was brought to a congregational meeting and a motion was passed giving Clarke sole discretion in the matter of exchanges. The exchange thus went ahead and there was no further consideration of the issue for over two years.

During that period, however, opposition to Parker within the denomination grew stronger and when Rev. John Sargent of the Benevolent Fraternity announced an exchange with Parker in December, 1844, the Boston Unitarian ministers' meeting requested that he not do so. When he went ahead with the exchange he was censured by the Fraternity. A month later, the ministers considered excluding Parker from giving the Thursday lecture, but decided against doing so after strong contrary insistence by Clarke and Henry W. Bellows.

On Sunday, January 12, 1845 Clarke preached a sermon about the disturbing growth of a spirit of exclusion with Boston Unitarianism and that to counter it he felt duty-bound to exchange with Parker on the last Sunday in January. The next Friday morning the pastoral committee called on him to say that it was thought by some members of the congregation that he had no right to arrange such an exchange without consulting them. He answered that the congregation decision two years before had left the issue of exchanges solely with him. The committee reported this colloquy to the congregation after the service on January 19. Unsatisfied, the dissidents called for a congregational meeting on the subject with the result that two well-attended congregations were held during the ensuing week where the issue was hotly debated. Clarke said he would withdraw the invitation only if a majority vote of the congregation directed him to do so. In defending his position, Clarke contended: "Romanism has tried crushing heresy, and Romanism is now a dry and barren tree. Protestantism has tried excluding heresy and excluding the heretic, and Protestantism is fast going to seed. I know of no other principle of Union that can save the church. I think in this question is involved the question whether hereafter there shall be any Church of Christ on earth." (Bolster, 1954, pp. 154-155)

The issue was never put to a vote. Sixteen dissidents decided to resign from the church. Among them were some of his strongest supporters, including George Channing, editor of the church paper and one of Clarke's closest friends. It was particularly hurtful to Clarke that Channing had called him a monomaniac during the course of one of the congregational meetings. The dissidents went on to form their own congregation, called Church of the Savior.

The exchange took place as planned, with Parker preaching a mild and tasteful sermon entitled “The Excellence of Goodness.” Clarke was so emotionally overwrought at the thought of the dissidents staging their own service apart from his congregation, that he could not start the service in West Roxbury for several minutes. It took a few years for the Church of the Disciples to regain its momentum after the split, but Clarke continued to believe over the years that he had taken the correct course in maintaining principle.

Clarke believed that Parker was correct in his assertion that through the intuitions of reason (“not the faculty that argues but that which sees”) people can perceive three great facts—“God, Virtue, and Immortality.” He contended, however that Parker missed seeing that there was something in Jesus’ life and teaching not known through the intuitions of reason yet necessary for the peace of the human soul and the progress of humanity—God’s love *for* and pardon *of* the sinner.

Clarke was also critical of Parker’s extreme severity of rhetoric against his opponents” I cannot approve of Theodore Parker’s severity. I consider it false, because extravagant’ unjust because indiscriminate; unchristian, because relentless and unsympathizing.” Colville p. 167)

Further according to Clarke, , Parker had failed to take into proper consideration that Jesus believed himself to be a “special and peculiar illumination” of God as the “Way, the Truth, and the Life.” Rather than being purported violations of natural law, as suggested by Parker, Jesus’ miracles were the expressions of a hitherto unknown spiritual force modifying the action of the known laws which govern matter. “ That physical law should obey the force of soul is incredible only when we regard outward nature as a machine, and its forces as unspiritual and dead.” (Clarke, 1859, pp. 19-20). In short, Parker’s theology left him cold but that was not his assessment of Parker as a person: “ But the man was not cold; the man was not empty of life or of love, but filled with both. I have honored his manly courage, been touched by his tender humanity, and grieved at the blow which terminated his labors here; for my savior, my Christ, is one who will honor and approve the manly soul which honestly disowns him but lives for virtue, more than the painted hypocrisy which utters all orthodoxy and practices all meanness.” (Clarke, 1859, pp. 21-22)

In January of 1850 Clarke came down with typhoid fever and nearly died. He was in poor health during ensuing months and finally in August he decided to take his doctor’s advice and ask his congregation for an indefinite leave of absence. They sold their Freeman Place Chapel to Second Church. The Clarke family then headed for Anna’s home in Meadville, Pa. where he stayed for three years. While there he taught courses at Meadville Seminary, was an associate minister at the Unitarian Church there., and did extensive writing—three books written, one book translated and fifty articles published. His health restored he returned to Boston and the Church of the Disciples in the fall of 1853. The church members book showed that 158 of the members on the rolls in 1849 had departed, leaving only 67 official members. The treasury was low. They had met monthly at the YMCA during Clarke’s absence. They began a slow process of rebuilding, reestablishing their church program on their founding principles. The merged with the Indiana Place Church and thus had a building again,

seating 500 hundred people. The first services were held in January of 1855. This was their tenth home in fifteen years.

. Sunday attendance and membership slowly built up until by 1860 an average of more than 350 attended over a four week period and 404 people on Easter Sunday. A new church to accommodate more people was needed by 1867 as on many occasions the 500 seat capacity was entirely filled and people had to be turned away. A new church was built on Warren Street and dedicated, debt-free on February 18, 1869. The total cost of the building and land was \$70,00. It seated 1500 people in the sanctuary. The downstairs area housed a large hall, a small hall, Sunday Scholl, library and minister's office. It was not considered a beautiful building, but it was the sort of building which embodied Clarke's idea of a church, a place to go to received good and to do good and not a beautiful architectural masterpiece.

For the last 19 years of his ministry, Clarke had a facility which was a fulfillment of his dreams. All his basic congregational theories remained intact, except for the fact that lay preaching had not become as established as he hoped it would be. Attendance and congregational membership steadily increased after the move to the new building. At first attendance averaged 500 but increased steadily to 600, with attendance often exceeding 800 people. On occasion it was filled to its 1500 person capacity. Membership in 1871 was 598 (Colville, according to Church Records) The Sunday School had a weekly attendance of 400 with 50 teachers and a library of more than 2,000 volumes. Social club of eighty young people met twice a month and a young adult group which often numbered between 300 and 400. Courses of lectures were given. One entitled "What is Being Done in Boston", concerned "varying classes of unfortunates." Another series dealt with one of Clarke's perennial themes—cooperation and mutual appreciation among various religious groups in Boston. It was entitled "The "True Universal Church," and featured a" Roman Catholic priest, an Episcopal bishop, Methodist, Baptist, Universalist, and Swedenborgian ministers, a member of the Society of Friends, and a Free Religionist. There were Bible classes and seminars in comparative religion, as well. given by Clarke." (Bolster, p. 301).

Edward Everett Hale, a contemporary ministerial colleague claimed that there were two sorts of people who filled the Church of the Disciples: "First there was the 'old line' of the Church of the Disciples, a body of worshipers, recruited from almost every class of society, who were interested in his studies for the truth, and followed them in the order they took in his mind. The fundamental principle of a 'Free Church' made it easy for people who had few other social ties in Boston to feel at home in the Church of the Disciples, and the congregation had probably a larger share than is usual of new-comers to the city, who began their attendance because attracted by its ready hospitality, and continued it because drawn by the sturdy, straightforward earnestness of the preacher, and his entire indifference to popular opinion or the arts of sensation (Hale, 1891, p. ) Concurring with this estimate of his earnestness are such discerning adherents as Margaret Fuller, John Andrew and Julia Ward Howe who wrote eloquently of Clarke's attractive pulpit presence.

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Bolster claimed that people were drawn principally by Clarke's reputation as a great Unitarian. His books and sermons were widely read. For instance, his book *Ten Great Religions* had gone through more than twelve editions by 1880. Eventually it was to go to 19 editions. His book on Self Culture went to at least 23 editions. His poems and articles appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Beginning in 1873 his sermons appeared each week in the *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*. More than 500 sermons appeared in this venue.

In many respects he had a high public profile as a member of the State Board of Education, as one who spoke out often in public forums about social issues, and as one who testified for Women's Rights before the Massachusetts legislature. He also got involved in partisan politics after the Civil War because he was concerned about the corruption in government. "The nation, Saved by blood, purified by fire, is not to be ruined by pickpockets" (Bolster thesis, 579.) He got himself elected as a delegate to the 1873 Republican State Convention in order to block the nomination of Benjamin Butler as governor because he thought him morally unfit for office. His speech at the convention was so impressive that some delegates wanted him to run for governor. When he ran to be a delegate to the 1876 Republican national convention he was easily elected. Perhaps his most publicized foray into elective politics occurred during the presidential election of 1884. Clarke was one of the mugwumps who refused to support the Republican candidate James Blaine because they believed him to be corrupt and supported instead, the Democratic candidate, Grover Cleveland, governor of New York. . The Republicans made much of the fact that Cleveland had fathered a child out of wedlock and was a known sexual libertine. Cleveland had admitted fathering a child some years before but he denied the libertine charge. Carl Schurz, one of Cleveland's advisors asked that Clarke endorse Cleveland. After a personal meeting with Cleveland and getting a good report from references in Buffalo, he gave a rousing endorsement for Cleveland in a Boston speech widely reported throughout the country.

Many Cleveland supporters thought Clarke had been duped and criticized him heavily for supporting Cleveland. His close friend, ministerial colleague Henry Hedge, accused him of "shutting his eyes to the truth." This was hurtful to Clarke as was criticism from some of his parishioners which was so strong that he felt obliged to call a special meeting in the vestry to explain his rationale for supporting Cleveland.

After Clarke's death in 1888 from intestinal cancer (Bolster's best estimate), the church called his hand-picked successor, Charles Gordon Ames who served the congregation for 23 years until his death at age 83 in 1912. Ames' ministry was followed by that of Abraham Mitrie Ribany who served as an associate during the last year of Ames' tenure and then went on to serve the congregation as minister until his retirement in 1938. He was the congregation's last settled minister. Membership had begun to dwindle at that point and their building was sold in 1940. On March 26, 1941, they voted to accept the cordial invitation of the Arlington Street Church to join them in worship and service while continuing identity as a legal entity. On May 25, 1941, a union service of

the two congregations was held at which Samuel A. Eliot, minister of the Arlington Street Church and former president of the AUA preached a sermon on “The Disciples and the Apostles.”

Thus, the Church of the Disciples existed as a separate entity for 100 years and continues on as a merged entity with Arlington Street Church. What are the implications for us today of this remarkable congregation?

### Implications for Contemporary Unitarian Universalist Congregations

1. *Welcoming People from all economic strata.* Clarke’s abolishing of pew rental enabled those of limited means to feel comfortable within the congregation and broadened the base of membership and participation. How do we extend ourselves in welcoming newcomers of all economic levels? An example of something I’ve thought about in my previous congregations is the annual opening service water communion. Everyone is encouraged to bring water from their summer travels and to pour it into a common container while saying something about the place they visited. Many expensive trips to exotic vacation spots have been mentioned. How does this register with the person unable to afford such a vacation? I began to think about this when I heard someone relate his experience as a child at the start of the school year and everyone was asked to share with the class about their summer vacations. His family hadn’t been able to afford a vacation, so when it came his turn to share he made up a fabulous vacation to Washington, D.C. How many low-cost or no-cost activities are provided in congregational programming? Are congregations built in areas easily accessible by public transportation?
2. It is remarkable the degree to which Clarke’s novel features of congregational life have been commonplace among us. I don’t know of any UU congregations raising money by renting or selling pews. A pledging system is the general means of raising money. Most congregations have a social justice committee to organize the social justice and social service activities. The organizational structure of our congregations is very similar to The Church of the Disciples. In the congregations I have served there has been an attempt to achieve gender balance on the board and various committees. There are various degrees of involvement of the congregation in worship. There is lay preaching from time to time and many congregations have a worship associates program where lay people take part in various parts of the worship service. Congregational democracy with every member having a vote was very important to the Church of the Disciples and is a core Principle in contemporary Unitarian Universalism. Their committing one-third of their budget to outreach is a challenge to us all.

3. The minister as un-anxious presence is an important principle arising out of the work of Rabbi Edwin Friedman in his application of family systems theory to congregational life. This was very much evident in Clarke's relationship to the congregation. In a historical sketch given in 1891 on the occasion of the congregations' 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Henry Williams, a charter member gave this summary of Clarke's influence on the congregation when asked what accounted for the congregation's success: p. 16 "For myself, I answer, it was the wonderful personality of Clarke himself. It is not easy to tell in a few words the secret of his strength and abiding influence with his people. But that which impressed me most, and more and more as the years went on, was the calmness and tranquility of his bearing at all times and under all circumstances. He never seemed to be taken by surprise or to lose his composure, no matter what THE PROVOCATION, NO MATTER WHAT THE PERPLEXITY. This quality of his nature brought repose and( 17) strength to those who went to him for comfort and help, because they instinctively felt that it had its source in the very springs of his being. His simplicity and absolute sincerity inspired a confidence and trust which made us listen to his teachings, though we might not always agree with him. It was the sweet reasonableness of the man, his patience and his unbounded charity, that persuaded us. He was so candid, so ready to discern the good in the midst of error and evil, that he disarmed our prejudices, we hardly knew when or how. I have often winced under his criticism of some of my political idols; but I never rebelled or refused to hearken, and, in the end, I for the most part found myself acquiescing in these judgments. Important to this process was Clarke's clear delineation of his position to provide leadership but not demanding that others think as he thought. Julia Ward Howe, also commented on this issue in her retrospective at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary: "Our leader was a man of definite and outspoken opinions, and was able to maintain these with force and warmth enough. But his mind and character were of that quality which could see into differences and beyond them."
4. The Church of the Disciples serves as a good model for achieving a high degree of unity of purpose amidst significant theological differences. Again, Julia Ward Howe summed it up nicely: 41 "So let us say that those whose spiritual experiences appear to be the opposite each of the other are always seeking to rear some structure upon which the religious consent of the community may rest. The keystone must be supplied by the intelligence which can understand what is sought on both sides, and by the charity which, reconciling both in itself, can reconcile them with each other...This church of ours has had its part, if I mistake not, in this important work. In the denomination to which we belong and which is pledged to just such work, we have perhaps been able to keep it in view more than have some other societies. As this office of the reconciliation of human differences is one very vital to society, religious and other, I feel that we as individuals and as a body are pledged and bound to continue it.," (41)
5. The widespread use of "covenant groups," or small group ministry in our congregations is very much in line with Clarke's social principle of providing opportunities for people to get to know each other well and to develop supporting relationships. It also is a means of refining religious knowledge and experience, something I call epistemological insurance protection. As a transcendentalist Clarke put a premium on the intuitive perception of spiritual truths regarding God, morality, and immortality. In practice his system of group discussion of an



issue refined individual perceptions and attitudes, so that the group process came out with a superior product—often, as Clarke believed in Hegelian fashion—thesis, antithesis, synthesis . It is very much in line with our Unitarian Universalist Principle of promoting a “free and disciplined search for truth and meaning.”

6. I like the tradition of the Church of the Disciples having a grand birthday celebration for their minister at every decade of his life, starting with his fiftieth birthday and continuing with his sixtieth and seventieth and then also one at his seventy-fifth. There are transcripts of the fiftieth and seventieth readily available. They include tributes from neighboring clergy and from parishioners. Julia Ward Howe and Oliver Wendell Holmes had clever and inspiring poetic tributes in both. Clarke said regarding the congregation on the occasion of his seventieth birthday party: “This church was formed in April, 1841, with forty-three members. Its creed was faith in Jesus as a teacher and master, its aim the study and practice of Christianity. We have worked together in this spirit and purpose during nearly forty years, and I think our church has done good. Not so much as we might and ought to have done, but yet something. I have had great joy in this church, and have been helped by it in many ways. (p.21)

