

**Transition to Opening Worship and Worship Service
June 24, 2009
General Assembly – Salt Lake City, Utah**

Transition from Plenary I to Worship:

During this segment, African drumming, and drumming joined with the music of Dr. Ysaye M. Barnwell, can be heard. Slides running on the screen show images from Rev. Sinkford's pilgrimage to Africa.

Rev. Eric Cherry: From November 4 – 24, 2008 UUA President Sinkford, Paula Cole Jones, Maria Sinkford and I – Reverend Eric Cherry – visited 6 African countries: South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria. The four general goals of this journey were:

1. To learn from the experience and wisdom of leaders in Truth and Reconciliation work in South Africa,
2. To meet with old and new colleagues among the Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists of Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and South Africa,
3. To learn from leaders of social justice and human rights organizations
4. To visit the UNESCO World Heritage site and center of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Île de Gorée.

As we prepare for Opening Worship, please enjoy these photographs taken during the Pilgrimage. If you would like to find out more about this incredible journey, please join us for our workshop on Saturday.

The first collection of photos were taken in Uganda – and it is a pleasure to introduce you to Reverend Mark Kiyimba – the founder and leader of the UU Association of Uganda:

Mark Kiyimba: Greetings! I am Reverend Mark Kiyimba, and I am so pleased to be with you. This is my first visit to the United States, and, of course, to a UUA General Assembly.

However, this is not the first time that I have met American Unitarian Universalists. I have met a few of you during meetings of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, and I have met others of you, including Reverend Sinkford, during visits you have made to Uganda. It is good to be with you again.

When President Sinkford visited Uganda last November, he was introduced to many of the leaders of our two UU congregations, and to two of our social justice ministries: An HIV/AIDS orphanage, and the New Life School for children whose parents have died from HIV/AIDS. In a moment you'll see a few photos on the screen from his visit. I hope you will enjoy them and be touched by them.

And, I look forward to being with you throughout General Assembly.

Eric Cherry

For this evening's opening worship we are delighted to have the distinguished musician, Dr. Ysaye Barnwell, leading the music. Dr. Barnwell is a composer, arranger, author, actress, cultural activist, and a member of the African American female a capella ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock. She will be collaborating with members of Mountain Desert District choir members to bring us our music this evening. Thank you for being here, Ysaye.

Olufemi Matimoju:

Greetings! I am Olufemi Matimoju, the General Secretary of First Unitarian Church of Nigeria. Like my friend from Uganda, Mark Kiyimba, this is also my first visit to the US and my first General Assembly, though this is a reunion meeting with Rev. Sinkford for myself as well.

Unitarians have existed in Lagos, Nigeria since 1917 when Bishop Adeniran Adedeji Isola's liberal religious outlook led to his break with the Anglican Church of Nigeria, and to the founding of what would become the Unitarian Brotherhood Church - Ijo Isokan Gbogbo Eda on Lagos Island.

Last November, it was an honor to host Rev. Sinkford in worship at that congregation's historic building, to introduce him to its current members and leaders, and to feel the confidence of re-forming a strong relationship between American and Nigerian Unitarianism.

And it is a great pleasure to be with you this evening. I look forward to sharing with you throughout General Assembly.

Thank you for welcoming me. Thank you for viewing these slides, and may there be many future "pilgrimages" to Africa in the years to come.

[the worship service begins]

GA Opening Worship in Three Acts

Act I: Expanding the Family

Invocation (Rev. Thomas R. Goldsmith)

As the joy and electricity of General Assembly continues to pulsate, and our excitement of reconnecting with friends and colleagues stirs our hearts with gladness, may we find a moment of stillness and some space for reflection. May we as religious liberals invoke the spirit of that which we call sacred, a holy awakening to see our world and our lives with open eyes.

In our worship tonight it is vitally important for us to invoke the honest memory of history and build a healing bridge between the past and present. We must acknowledge the uneasy task of coming to terms with what has been. We struggle with how we might live with the sins of the past.

And thus we invoke the spirit of confession, responsibility, and restoration, and may they be upon this house and in our hearts. We invoke the spirit of human understanding and the unending promise of love to guide us in this tumultuous world of conflict. May past transgressions against humanity chasten us with a clearer vision of existing evil, and so may we learn to walk together with all the people of this world with humility and love. Amen

Hymn: *Spirit of Life* (John Hubert)

Our first song in worship this evening will be Carolyn McDade's *Spirit of Life*. We will present this song in 4 languages beginning with a call and response singing in Spanish. We are joined by the Rev. Lilia Cuervo, Rev. Endre Nagy, and the Rev. Helpme Mohrmen.. Lilia, who serves the Muttown UU Fellowship in New York and was one of the founders of the Spanish language ministry in San Jose, California, will sing the piece in Spanish. You are invited to join in singing with her as you feel comfortable. Endre is minister at the Gyergyószentmiklós fellowship and the Csíkszereda church in Transylvania and will be singing this song in Hungarian. You are invited to join in singing with him if you feel comfortable with the language. The Rev. Helpme Mohrmen is minister of the Unitarian Church of Puriang in Khasi Hills, India and will be singing this song in the Northeastern Indian language of Khasi. Please feel free to join him if you are so comfortable. We will then conclude with a singing of this song of reverence and prayer in English.

Please rise in body or spirit and repeat after Lilia Cuervo:.

(Spanish, trans. by Ervin Barrios):

Fuente de Amor, ven hacia mí.
Y al corazón, cántale tu compassion.
Sopla al volar, sube en la mar,
Hasta moldear la juticia de la vida.
Arráigame, libérame,
Fuente de Amor, ven a mí, ven a mí

(Hungarian):

Isten lelke, jöjj el hozzánk.

Ald meg szivünk, minden őszinte nagy álmát.

Jöjj a széllel, a tengerben,

Vezesd lelkünk, za örök igazság útján.

Szárnyakat kapsz, szabad leszel.

Isten lelke, jöjj hozzánk, jöjj hozzánk.

(Khasi):

Mynsiem jingim, to wan sha nga

Rwai ha dohnud; ki jingpynkhih mynsiem sngewlem

Beh ha ka lyer, per ha duriaw

Khih ha lynchoh; ban pynwan dur jingim ba hok

Thied bat ia nga, thabniang pynlait

Mynsiem jingim wan sha nga wan sha nga.

(English):

Spirit of life, come unto me.

Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.

Blow in the wind, rise in the sea,

Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.

Roots hold me close; wings set me free;

Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.

Reading: Responsive Resolution and Prayer
Rev. Josh Pawelek and Janice Marie Johnson

Janice: At the 2007 General Assembly in Portland, OR, in response to both the Secretary's Report and the Report of the Committee on Right Relationships, delegates moved that the General Assembly Planning Committee arrange for delegates and attendees to spend this time working together to gain insight, skills, and experience with:

Josh: Our own individual assumptions when encountering new people; and engaging in compassionate response and witness when we fall short of our aspirations to expand our capacity to be allies to our fellow Association members and our larger community.

Janice: This resolution is our resolution.

Josh: This worship service is our effort to respond to this resolution.

Janice: We invite you now to enter a time of prayer and reflection.

Josh: Sit comfortably. Breathe deeply.

Janice: Let us pray.

Josh: It is ancient wisdom that says ‘Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength.’

Janice: It is ancient wisdom that says ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

Josh: Easy to say.

Janice: Hard to live.

Josh: Easy to forget.

Janice: The invitation is always there.

Josh: Easy to ignore.

Janice: The invitation is still there.

Josh: Easy to fail.

Janice: The invitation to love what is holy and to love our neighbors as ourselves is eternal.

Josh: We respond to the invitation in many ways.

Janice: We have many words for it.

Josh: We preach about it.

Janice: We teach about it.

Josh: We wrestle with it.

Janice: We struggle with it.

Josh: Ancient Mother, we struggle with it.

Janice: Holy God, we struggle with it.

Josh: We fall short of our vision for ourselves.

Janice: We lose our way.

Josh: Yet we can find it again.

Janice: The invitation to love what is holy and to love our neighbor as ourselves is eternal.

Josh: We make assumptions.

Janice: We do make assumptions.

Josh: About God.

Janice: About the Sacred.

Josh: About our neighbors.

Janice: About people we perceive as different from ourselves.

Josh: Assumptions are like prisons for the other and the self.

Janice: They wall us in, hold us down, keep us in place.

Josh: We ought to get to know each other first.

Janice: Know each other deeply.

Josh: Know each other's passions and dreams.

Janice: Know each other's gifts and talents.

Josh: Know each other's challenges and failings.

Josh: Know each other's joys.

Janice: Know each other's sufferings and sorrow.

Janice: Know each other's children.

Josh: Know each other's parents.

Janice: Know each other's stories.

Josh: Know each other's histories.

Janice: Know each other's names.

Josh: Know each other's families.

Janice: Know each other's people.

Josh: Then we can be allies.

Janice: Then we can be accountable.

Josh: Then we can work together

Janice: Sing together.

Josh: Dance together.

Janice: Dream together.

Josh: Seek justice together.

Janice: Build community together.

Josh: Pray together.

Janice: Recall the ancestors together.

Josh: Say *Hallelujah* together.

Janice: Say *Masakhane* together.

Josh: Say *Shalom* together.

Janice: Say *Blessed Be* together.

Josh: And let us not fool ourselves—along the way, we will fall short.

Janice: Along the way we will miss our mark.

Josh: Along the way we will let each other down.

Janice: Along the way we will fail.

Josh: But the invitation to love what is holy and to love our neighbors as ourselves is always there.

Janice: That invitation is eternal.

Josh: Let us hold each other when we fall short of our vision.

Janice: Let us respond with compassion when we miss our mark.

Josh: May our bonds remain strong even when we let each other down.

Janice: May our hearts remain open, even when we fail.

Josh: May we remember the ancient wisdom that calls us to “Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all our strength.”

Janice: May we remember the ancient wisdom that calls us to “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Josh: May we remember here and now.

Janice: May we remember here and now.

Josh: To make our time together sacred.

Janice: To make our time together holy.

Josh: So that we may be community.

Janice: So that we may call each other beloved.

Josh: The invitation is eternal.

Janice: The invitation is eternal.

Together: The Invitation is eternal. Let us, once again, accept the invitation.

Passing of the Peace - Eric Cherry

We meet each other in Faith

We meet each other in Worship

We meet each other in Reconciliation

We meet each other in Peace.

During worship services throughout President Sinkford’s pilgrimage to six African countries, the “Passing of the Peace” was a common liturgical act. For the pilgrims, it came to exemplify being “embodied” in worship - the embodied expression of covenantal love and commitment within the community of faith. Often this ritual included singing and dancing, but it always meant meeting those around you “eye to eye” and “hand to hand”. It was the physical expression of souls touching souls.

As this community comes together now in faith, in worship, in reconciliation and in peace, please, greet each of your neighbors – those who are near you or perhaps a few rows away from you. Greet them hand to hand and eye to eye. Greet them with the phrase “Peace be with you” or “Love be with you” or “God be with you” or a similar phrase. Rise or remain seated, but please take this opportunity to greet one another.

And in a few moments, as we greet each other, John Hubert will lead us in singing *We have the Love*. As we sing, I would invite you to continue passing the peace to each

other. Dance to each other. Sing to each other. Greet each other in Faith, in Worship, in Reconciliation, and in Peace.

Peace be with you.

(Worship leaders on stage illustrate “passing the peace.” After 2-3 minutes John Hubert introduces We Have the Love. People sing and continue greeting each other. Music eventually resolves into the accompaniment tune for “We Begin Again in Love”)

John Hubert:

Our song for this celebratory time is *We Have the Love* by the Rev. Mary Grigolia. This song was based upon remarks by the Rev. Dan Aldridge at the 1996 Unitarian Universalist Urban Church Conference. I invite you to allow this music to swell, grow, and move as it moves you. Please repeat after me:

(Singing) We have the will... We have the energy... We have the energy to put our will to work in the world... We have the will... We have the energy... We have the love.

Let's sing it all together now!

(1st verse) We have the will, we have the energy to put our will to work in the world

We have the will, we have the energy, we have the love

(Spoken) We have the skills, we have the ways and means to put our skills to work in the world, we have the skills, we have the ways and means, we have the love.

(2nd verse) We have the skills, we have the ways and means to put our skills to work in the world, we have the skills, we have the ways and means, we have the love.

(Spoken) We have a dream, we have our healing hand to put our dream to work in the world, we have a dream, we have our healing hands, we have the love.

(3rd verse) We have a dream, we have our healing hand to put our dream to work in the world, we have a dream, we have our healing hands, we have the love.

Act II: Compassionate Witness and Response

Truth and Reconciliation – Rev. William G. Sinkford

In 1999 when we last gathered here in Salt Lake City, the General Assembly opened with a Ceremony of Native American Acknowledgement. Forrest Cuch, the Executive Director of the Utah Division of Indian Affairs and a member of the Ute Indian nation, welcomed us. In his remarks, he spoke about the conquest of the native peoples, what

our history books call the Indian Wars: “We still believe that there needs to be a discussion, and a thorough grieving of what took place. And once we forgive each other, we should move on.” He closed by saying, “Our spirits are the same, because they all come from the same source. We are all related, we are all brothers and sisters, we are all connected, and I say, welcome brothers and sisters.”

None of us knew, at that time, how related we were.

Here is the short version of the story. Following the Civil War, elements of the Union Army were deployed to take the lands of the native peoples on the Great Plains so that whites could pursue their Manifest Destiny. The armed contest was often intense. Remember Custer’s Last Stand at the Little Big Horn River.

The Indians were finally overwhelmed and relocated onto reservations, mostly lands that held no appeal for whites. Government “Agencies” were set up on the reservations. For a time, the military ran these agencies. But in 1870, President Grant asked the various Protestant religious denominations to take over.

Have you guessed where this story is going? The young American Unitarian Association, accepted the responsibility for the Northern Ute people, then living in Colorado.

From the AUA Yearbook for 1870: “A new feature of work has been suggested during the year by an invitation from the Government to take part, along with the other religious bodies of the country, in the elevation and improvement of the native Indians.”

Unitarian ministers were dispatched to head two agencies with responsibility for the Ute’s. The goal, according to Unitarian Rev. E. H. Danforth, agent at White River, Colorado, was “to induce them to settle in permanent abodes and assume the habits and dress of civilized life, - to do some kind of work other than hunting.”

Today we would call this cultural imperialism; a new culture, a new way of life on a people. Then it was called offering civilization to the Indians. The results were tragic. Let me quote Francis Walker, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, writing in 1872: “To the white man freedom of expansion is of incalculable value. To the Indian it is of incalculable cost ... We are richer by hundreds of millions; the Indian is poorer by a large part of the little that he has. This growth is bringing imperial greatness to the nation; to the Indian it brings wretchedness, destitution and beggary.”

The white appetite for land remained voracious. By 1881, the Utes were relocated once again, forced to leave their precious Colorado land and come here, ultimately giving this state its name.

An attempt was made to start schools for the Indian children. Rev. Danforth, in a letter to the AUA: “A little has been done by us to be reported in the direction of a School. A year ago last fall Mrs. Danforth had all she could do to attend to those who came to her. Later

in the season they fell off, and through the Winter and Spring months the average attendance at the school, I believe, was eight.”

Our ministers did defend the Indians and urged the government not to allow whites to make war on them. Rev. J. Nelson Trask, agent at Los Pinos, Colorado, writing to Washington: “The truth is, that many of the people of this territory are indefatigable in their efforts to make the Indians appear vicious and dangerous, and so as to help each other in filling the papers with rumors of danger, making everything seem to tend toward war. I regard war with the Utahs as utterly inexcusable, for the Utahs do not want war, and prompt, strong measures should at once be taken to prevent such an occurrence.”

I am still learning about this part of our history and I am painfully aware that only white voices are represented here. Based on what I’ve learned, the Unitarian agents do not seem to have been very effective. Perhaps, as a result, they did less damage than some of the more “successful” denominations.

The native peoples of Utah have been in the process of recording their side of the story. There is a moving display of that tragic history in the Exhibit Hall.

Yes, we are more related than we knew.

Reconciliation. What can, what should that look like for us as a religious people?

Last November, on the African pilgrimage, I learned some things about the S. African Truth and Reconciliation process.

I learned that the religious voice was critical in their process. Archbishop Tutu stood time after time at the center of controversy and said: “We are one people and we can be reconciled.” He was described as a broken record.

I learned that reconciliation is not something that happens at one moment in time. It is not something you can cross off your “to do” list. As Mary Burton, one of the original Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners said to me, “I have to work at reconciliation every day of my life.”

And I learned how important knowing and telling the stories can be.

Consider these thoughts as a work in process because I don’t claim to have this completely figured out.

What I believe is that reconciliation begins with truth telling, with knowing and telling the stories. Reconciliation begins with confession on both sides.

Reconciliation calls for contrition. The oppressor, the one who has done violence needs to say, “I’m sorry. I understand now that I (or we) were wrong and harmed you.” And the apology has to be heart felt.

Reconciliation also involves forgiveness. The person or the people who have been harmed have to find a space in their hearts to forgive, but not to forget.

All of these things are necessary for reconciliation, or better said, they allow the process of reconciliation to begin.

Because reconciliation is about relationship. It is about offering reparation for the harm done where that is possible. Repair and reparation stem from the same linguistic root.

And it is about the former oppressor, the person or group that has done harm, standing with and supporting the victims as the victims empower themselves and chart their own course.

And so, to the Ute people, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations offers our heart-felt apology. We participated, however ineptly, in a process that stole your land and forced a foreign way of life on you. Our congregations here in Utah have been doing exactly that.

We ask for your forgiveness and we promise to stand with you as you chart your way forward.

My friends, please welcome Forrest Cuch.

Forrest Cuch: *[comments unavailable for script]*

Anthem: Ysaye Barnwell and the Mountain Desert District Choir: *Balm in Gilead*

There is a Balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole

There is a Balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

There is a Balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole

There is a Balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my works in vain.

But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.

There is a Balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole

There is a Balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

Act III: Expanding Our Capacities and Going Forth

Homily: “We Ask You to Believe” Angela Herrera

“Caminante, no hay camino. Se hace camino al andar.”

Words of the poet Antonio Machado.

“Traveler, there is no road. One makes the path by walking.”

It is a blessing, and an honor, to walk with you tonight. How glad I am to be here; to share in:

the joyful work of reuniting our religious family,

the heartfelt, deepening work of compassionate witness and response,

and the call to expand, to grow in our capacity to create new relationships, drawing in closer where we would shy away.

“The invitation is eternal,” and with the slides from Africa, we get a sense of the incredible reuniting and healing that is possible in our human family. We also feel the work that remains to be done.

The litany of forgiveness reminds us that the path is not laid out clearly for us, and we have so much to learn. We will continue to make mistakes. But it’s something our UU faith prepares us well to do.

When I was a child, growing up Unitarian Universalist in a small town in Oregon—a town that seemed to have as many churches as it had pickup trucks—I remember thinking that what set my faith apart was that you could believe whatever you want. In fact, I told my scraggly group of neighborhood friends, you don’t have to believe *anything* in order to be a Unitarian Universalist. They looked skeptical. “There’s no creed,” I explained. That much was true. But as I grew up, my faith grew up, too.

I lived in a rough part of that little town; a blue-collar neighborhood that was no stranger to street fights. But my mother, a housewife working her way through college a couple of classes at a time, would often pile us into the car, pick up my grandmother, and drive past the little churches in our town, whose creeds seemed too confining, and whose vision of the world—well, seemed to belong to some *other* world. Not the nitty gritty one we lived in. Not the one where people were more complicated than saved and not saved, good and not good. We’d travel nearly an hour to First Unitarian Church in Portland where we sang Spirit of Life, and talked about worth and dignity.

It meant a lot at the time, but it would take a test of faith for me to really understand what Unitarian Universalists believe in. The test unfolded over the years after my family drifted away from church, adolescent years marked by separation and worry, and trying to just scrape by. Years when I would leave home too early, drift into the margins of local

gang, and find myself in the grocery store one day, 18 years old, 8 weeks pregnant, secretly happy, and acutely aware that no one was going to tell me congratulations ...except, perhaps, for the psychiatric patients I cared for part time in a local nursing home, whose sense of reality was too distorted, their own place in society too low, to look down on a teen mom whose life was about to take a 180. It was somewhere in this milieu of living with and caring for the marginalized, knowing I had disappointed someone else's God, and feeling unexpectedly hopeful, that my call to a vocation of love and empowerment took root. Later I would recognize it as a call to ministry. That time of fending for my own and others' inherent worth and dignity led me to realize *it's not true that you don't have to believe anything*.

It's not true.

We're not preaching the gospel of disbelief. We are a community of *believers*. And what we ask you to believe is that you are already holy. Yes you are.

Whether you are at peace, or are troubled as the Colorado River,

Whether you come in need of forgiveness, or of forgiving others;

in need of confession, or company, or seeking meaning;

you are already holy, and we call you into this community, this *communion*, just as you are.

Just as you are.

In all likelihood, if you stick around long enough, you will eventually come in all of those states. "You do not have to be good," says another poet, Mary Oliver. "You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting." Come in, and wherever we gather, it is holy ground. Let this holy place be a balm for your spirit.

And yet, to believe you are already holy takes courage. It raises the bar. To be holy no matter who you are is to subvert traditional expectations—low expectations—and it calls you to something higher, better. This kind of faith wants not just to soothe the troubled spirit; it seeks also to restore wholeness to what is continually broken. Relationships--the interdependent web. They are broken by human brokenness. By alienation, fear, and systems of oppression so pervasive they can only be called evil. This is hard work. It's big work for an imperfect, holy people.

We struggle both as individuals and together as a people of faith, and we see in the story of the Ute nation and the Unitarians that our own denomination has been "sin-sick" in the past, and we know it continues to be—though it is hard to accept, though we wish with all our hearts that it weren't so, that we could will it otherwise by intention. But we can't. And because we believe each person is holy, each person a child of God, of the universe, of equal worth, we are called to persist in building the beloved community, even when it is difficult. Even when we discover what difficult means in practice. That's where the rubber hits the road. When we try to live this theology out, drawing in close to the

stranger, to our own assumptions, to the edge of our comfort zone and then *beyond*. Doubt starts to whisper in our ears all the reasons this isn't the right time, or the right place, or right person with whom to go deeper into right relationship. But we are called to *expand* our capacity, which is also to say, to hold ourselves and each other accountable to do this work. To grow spiritually. We can't settle for anyone falling through the cracks.

Who are we, that we can do this?

The story I grew up hearing, about who Unitarian Universalists are, seemed to be told in reverse, and often we still tell it this way today. We trace our present selves back to merger in 1961, and trace the merging faiths back to times when they broke away from other trajectories, or experienced fractures that shaped their identity. It's a story with themes of separation and rebellion. The break from trinitarianism, from orthodoxy, from creedalism. From the prescriptions of a culture.

This story tells us much about what we are not. Somewhat less about what we are. And practically nothing about the ancient tradition from which our theologies of love and justice—of relationship and restoration—have emerged.

I imagine our story differently. It starts in the beginning, before Sarah and Abraham, tracing Unitarian Universalism not from controversy, but from some of the first stirrings of the ancient question from which all faith was born: *What does this mean?*

When Moses stood barefoot on the brown-gray rock of the mountain, the voice of doubt in his ear, saying "Why me?" we were there, too, and the answer resonates still: "I will be with you."

We were there with the Greek philosophers, with their insistent inquiry and imagining,

And there when Jesus spoke the new covenant, the familiar comfort of the Seder table laid out before him for the last time, disciples leaning in close as he said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." His disciples would take his teachings to the people, each in their own way. Diversity has been true since the earliest days.

Passed along from one generation to the next, this faith has continued to do what it has always done, ever since the ancient question set it in motion: it has responded to the people, to the world around it. It is a living faith. What look like breaks with the past are actually moments of growth; the evolution of one strong and beautiful thread of something continuous, something powerful.

We are the inheritors of a faith that took root before history was recorded. A faith whose future, comprised of a million potentials, was present from the world's first moments.

And this day--with you there in your seat, breathing in unison with your neighbor and yearning to be part of wholeness, of something difficult and meaningful and deeply needed—this day was already taking shape.

We are the history pressing forward behind us. We are a faith brought to life through us,

through the work of our own hearts and hands, *in relationship*. In covenant. In the act of walking together, creating a path that has never existed before, and yet has been waiting for us. Our covenantal faith is a truly living faith.

Let us bring them all in.

Let no one slip through the cracks.

Let your work in these days, this General Assembly, this moment in history,
be an answer to the ever-present invitation.

And let us say,

Amen.

Benediction - Rev. Sean Parker Dennison

We make the path by walking it.
We create the path with each step we take together.
As we spend these next few days walking together,
May we walk
Toward justice,
Toward change,
Toward right relationship,
Toward compassion,
And toward a world in which
Every person matters,
And each of us knows
We can make a difference.
Go forth, gentle people,
And walk together
In the spirit of love.

Closing Song: *We Are* – Ysaye M. Barnwell and the Mountain Desert District Choir

For each child that's born a Morningstar rises and sings to the universe who we are|
For each child that's born a Morningstar rises and sings to the universe who we are
For each child that's born a Morningstar rises and sings to the universe who we are
We are our grandmother's prayers and we are our grandfathers' dreamings,
We are the breath of our ancestors; we are the spirit of God.
We are mothers of courage and fathers of time,
We are daughters of dust and the sons of great visions,
We're sisters of mercy and brothers of love,
We are lovers of life and the builders of nations
We're seekers of truth and keepers of faith,
We are makers of peace and the wisdom of ages.
We are our grandmother's prayers and we are our grandfathers' dreamings,

We are the breath of our ancestors; we are the spirit of God.

We are mothers of courage and fathers of time,
We are daughters of dust and the sons of great visions,
We're sisters of mercy and brothers of love,
We are lovers of life and the builders of nations
We're seekers of truth and keepers of faith,
We are makers of peace and the wisdom of ages.

For each child that's born a Morningstar rises and sings to the universe who we are
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