

# **Blessing Ways**

Rites for the Yearly Round

by

John Vlahos

## DEDICATION

To The Reverend Arnold Westwood  
and The Reverend Edwin A. Lane.  
Their belief and enthusiasm spurred  
the writing of these services.

## TO THE READER:

These rites for the yearly round were begun in 1964 with a Christmas service. It was written at the behest of The Reverend Arnold Westwood, then minister of the Unitarian Church in Westport, Connecticut. My husband was an award-winning dramatist whose works included theatrical plays, screen plays, and plays for television. Arnold thought John's talents could be turned to religious expression. So did Arnold's successor, The Reverend Edwin A. Lane, with whose enthusiastic encouragement John expanded the original services to celebrate the sacred in seasons and events all the year round.

What neither minister knew at the time was for how long and how deeply John had been a seeker of the sacred. By age ten he had visited on his own every church and synagogue in his home town of Springfield, Ohio. He was enabled to do so because the town's Greek Orthodox community did not yet have a church of its own and also because, in his ninth year, he went to work in his father's ice cream parlor/restaurant. He washed dishes weekends and after school, and, when business was slow, he could slip out for his religious visits. His parents thought he was going to the library (which he often did) and would have been shocked had they learned otherwise.

Perhaps it was this early exposure to worship in its many forms that gave the little boy a listening heart so that his older relatives and even perfect strangers in the store were moved to pour out to him their secret hopes, their fears, their woes.

Or perhaps it was his early experiences in public school. He arrived at first grade knowing not a word of English. Naturally he became the butt of much teasing and no little abuse. He may have learned empathy both from the bullying of thee many and the kindness of the few. But most of all he vowed to speak and write the English language better than anyone there. And he did.

Later he learned to love music, playing first violin in his school orchestra. He took well to public speaking and to acting and was later a graduate of Carnegie Mellon's Drama Department, earning his way by working in local restaurants. Still later came a stint in Hollywood writing Westerns. Then came World War II service in the Pacific commanding a Naval code-breaking unit. Still later came, marriage, family, and immersion in the new medium of live television. All his rich life experiences were poured into his dramas and still later and more poignantly into the *Blessing Ways* you have before you.

These have held meaning for members of and visitors to the Unitarian Church in Westport. They have been presented by other churches and are remembered still (and often recited) by the many young people who participated in them.

It is my hope and the hope of our children that you will find these *Blessing Ways* meaningful. That would be, I know, John's hope as well.

Olivia Vlahos

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# Watch Night

by

John Vlahos

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### The Watch Night

*The service works best with a small group of 20-30 people. They are seated in a circle. If possible screens should enclose the entire circle. If that is not possible at least one side should be screened so the readers (who will need small flashlights to read the script) are out of sight. There is no light in the circle and the exterior lights should be dim.*

*You will need a small brazier in the center with candles or candelabras on either side of it. A very small candle (to last just a few minutes) is in the brazier. The slips of paper should be small (about 2 x 2 inches) so their burning does not create a large amount of smoke.*

*You will need a recording of loud, clanging cathedral bells and a metronome amplified (for changing volume) to simulate the loud ticking of a clock.*

*The service should be timed so that the cathedral bells at the end come as close to midnight as possible.*

*Having a non-participant handling the sound and house lights facilitates the flow of the service.*

**Music:** Prelude

*Several male and female readers out of sight from behind the screens:*

**Male Voice**

Year's end is upon us!

**Female Voice**

Gone into memory  
Is yet another springtime.

**Male Voice**

Gone are the burgeoning hopes,

**Female Voice**

Shattered  
The chrysalis of our desirings

**Male Voice**

And that,  
Which for a golden time  
Found wing,  
Has fallen to earth—

**Male Voice**

Unfinished,

**Female Voice**

Unresolved,

**Male Voice**

Unfulfilled.

**Female Voice**

Gone into memory  
Is yet another springtime.

**Male Voice**

Year's end is upon us!

**Music:** Bridge

**Female Voice**

Summer has come,  
Summer has gone.

**Male Voice**

Lost in time  
Is yet another summer.

**Male Voice**

Lost are the blossoming joys,

**Female Voice**

Scattered the fragrant essences of love—

**Male Voice**

Of love given,

**Female Voice**

Love denied,

**Male Voice**

Love rejected,

**Female Voice**

Love lost.

**Female Voice**

Lost in time  
Is yet another summer.

**Male Voice**

Year's end is upon us!

**Music:** Bridge

**Male Voice**

Autumn's great harvest is past.

**Female Voice**

The blessings of another year  
Are spilled on barren ground,

**Male Voice**

And that which we have failed to sow—

**Male Voice**

All that which we shall never reap—

**Female Voice**

Lies fallow now,  
In the gray and wintry fields  
Of our uncultivated days,

**Male Voice**

Too late to gather in

**Male Voice**

Too late by one more year  
To gather in.

**Male Voice**

For  
Year's end is upon us!

**Male Voice**

Winter sits hard  
On every side.

**Female Voice**

Snow and ice  
Beset us.  
The winds of winter  
Chill our hearts.

**Male Voice**

For they are ancient winds—

**Male Voice**

Cruel winds—

**Female Voice**

Winds out of the hidden north  
Without memories  
Of summer's warmth  
Or springtime's freshets.

**Male Voice**

Winter sits hard upon our souls.

**Male Voice**

Year's end is upon us!

*The exterior lights go out.*

**Music:** To a punctuating climax

*The minister rises now and lights the candles/candelabras.*

**Minister**

We have come here tonight  
At year's end  
To stand watch  
Together.

Here,  
In the vaulting comfort  
Of this sanctuary

Where night holds no terrors.

We have gathered  
In the unbroken solace  
Of this magic round—

A family of friends  
Joined as one  
In the darkness  
That surrounds us—

Come  
For a final reckoning  
With this departing year.

Together,  
Bound thus  
By our common mortality  
Let us listen

In the fastnesses of this long night

To men and women of our kind

Speaking for us

Articulating  
That which we have known  
And they have known:

All the anguished yearnings,  
The sightless gropings,  
The hopes and pleadings,  
The depths  
Of our despairings,  
The muted, blackest moments  
Of fallible and struggling humanity  
In search of meaning

In this,  
Our life alone—

In this,  
Our shared existence!

*The minister sits.*

**Music: To a punctuating climax**

*If possible the readers have left and, using a microphone in another room, their voices emanating from the speakers in the sanctuary as the ticking of a metronome (simulating a ticking clock) precedes and separates each of their readings.*

*Metronome*

**Male Voice**

Plagued by all recurrent  
Miseries of manhood,  
To bed I go, dreaming,

Dreaming nightmares of awareness—  
To do battle with agonies of today  
And regrets of yesteryear.

Night unto night, I roam  
This frightful arena of my own undoing,  
Shoring up the crumbling,  
The weak and the sickened,  
The self-seeking condition  
Of my soul.

Away in despair, I turn  
Away, away from the truth-telling  
Image before me: that which I am  
And cannot escape, even in sleep  
Shuddering to behold  
The absolute I am become.

So running on then, toward dawn  
Running, I claw at eternity,  
Luckless in my grasping, as in my fleeing  
I go, go, go, down, a-stumble, down at last,  
Prostrate, down at the feet of  
Mine own, mine own, my very own deceiving.

Saved then, and be damned,  
I awaken, gurgling, to the brash innocence  
Of morning, rising by finger-tuggings  
To the outrageous, sweetly-sweet forgiveness  
Of another and another and another  
Daybreak!

*Metronome*

**Female Voice**

I want only to be loved.  
I care not how  
Nor when, nor where,  
Nor even why—  
So long as I am loved.

I want only to be loved.  
It need not be  
In leafy, sunlit bower  
Made sweet by birdsong—  
So long as I am loved.

I want only to be loved.  
And, being loved,  
That love I would compound  
Fourfold, and then again—  
So long as I am loved.

I want only to be loved.  
For I have need  
Of love and love  
And more love—

So long as I am loved.

I want only to be loved.

*Metronome*

**Male Voice**

To whom shall I turn today?

Wife and children follow their ordered paths,  
Secure in home and hearth,  
Whilst I am driven out  
Into the uncertain workways beyond.

To whom shall I turn today?

Friends busy themselves  
In their industrious pleasures.  
I can only look in  
And then move on.

To whom shall I turn today?

Business builds great walls  
That daily must be scaled.  
My footing grows precarious.  
I cannot find a handhold.

To whom shall I turn today?

The church is shaken to its core,  
Lost in grief and mourning.  
Can a dead deity succor me?  
In whose bosom, lamblike, shall I rest?

To whom shall I turn today?

Death will not be summoned  
Before his time.  
I lack the courage  
To seek him sooner.

To whom shall I turn today?

**Male Voice**

My Father died and somehow I  
Became the man he was—  
His place to take  
In some unspoken, curious way:  
My Mother turning now to me  
Now with new deference addressing  
Her small wants and larger needs  
So that, while I am son,  
More than son now am I,  
Some odd, illogical blend of  
Son and sire, a man at last

In her eyes, more than a child  
In which one prides and boasts  
Extravagant Mother-claims.  
And I, wanting to weep, to weep  
At my delayed maturing,  
Feeling not one bit ready  
For this unwonted role  
Yet, with a sigh, accepting it—  
I, who have not yet with his  
Unseemly passing made my peace.

So with my brother and my sister:  
Siblings that I tended once,  
And diapered and fed,  
So, with them, am I once again  
More than peer, more than elder,  
Like unto him who is gone,  
From us departed hence.

And by all others now in his name  
Am I called, turning belatedly  
With the shock of slow recognition,  
Struck with the knowing that  
It is I, not he, whom they address,  
Thinking they must be mistaken  
To hail me thus since he I am not,  
Could never be—how shall I ever?

Yet, so it goes and, as it grows,  
So does he grow in me with  
Enduring strength, rooting  
Himself within me deep,  
Like some alter ego—  
Alter yet idem, for  
We are become the same,  
He and I, Father and Son,  
And thus will it be until  
Mine own replaces me.

*Metronome*

**Female Voice**

I am trapped  
In spaces where nothing exists.

Doors catch me  
And hold me prisoner.

I fight off  
The enveloping arms of windows.

All the world  
Is a vessel.

I am stoppered  
In its voids.

Is there no way out?

*Metronome*

**Male Voice**

Sitting on the banks of futility,  
I watch my life eddy by.

**Female Voice**

Lying in the thickets of melancholy,  
I endure the pinpricks of anguish.

**Male Voice**

Walking against the winds of my despairing,  
I draw the cloak of self about me.

**Female Voice**

A darkness in the daytime  
Is my mind of late.

**Male Voice**

Living imprisons me.

**Female Voice**

I am held captive  
By the circumstances of being.

**Male Voice**

The chains of existence  
Bind me.

**Female Voice**

I am weighted  
By regrets.

**Male Voice**

Cares  
Stifle me.

**Female Voice**

Breathing itself  
Comes hard.

**Male Voice**

Yet, I go on.

**Female Voice**

Gasping,  
Groping,  
I go on.

**Male Voice**

Seeking  
I know not what.

**Female Voice**

Reaching

For something  
Not yet seen.

**Male Voice**

Looking for a home.

**Female Voice**

Somewhere ahead.

**Male and Female Voices**

In  
The  
Unknowable.

*Metronome*

**Male Voice**

That time when one must all his dreams revise,  
When life's high hopes along the wayside fall,  
When days are all devoid of sweet surprise:  
That time of life now holds me in its thrall.  
Far-reaching visions do not grip my soul,  
My heart no longer pounds with love's demands,  
Excesses of the body take their toll,  
And artless are the products of my hands.  
And yet—impoverished though I am—I would  
The remnants of my substance freely spend  
If, in the act of risking all, I could  
The breadth and passion of my dreams extend.  
I seek, I fear, no more than other men:  
Somehow to make the old seem new again.

**Female Voice**

I am grown holy with age:  
God draws near unto me,  
And into His Presence—  
With but one sweet song—  
Would I swiftly go.

**Male Voice**

Ask not for quarter in this life!  
Your soul do not lay bare!  
Hold fast your heart  
Within your breast!  
'Twas not for naught  
It was so well-enclosed  
In intertwining gage  
Of ribs and pectorals,  
Of sinew and bone,  
And anchored then against  
The back-broad uprightness  
Of Spine!

Your face keep turned  
Toward enemy and friend!  
Beware of lover and of kin!  
Not once let your defences rest!

'Gainst all who do approach  
With word or gift,  
With thought or deed,  
A steadfast watch maintain!  
Let not your caution  
Once be lulled if  
In this your world you would  
Survive!

To one and all present  
Your stoutest mien!  
Be wary of a smiling face!  
Do guard against  
The outstretched hand!  
At every cost avoid  
The promised sweet embrace!  
All kisses fast forswear!  
Deny the yearning touch!  
At bay hold off the pleading tears  
And you may yet live out  
This day!

Keep near a cudgel!  
Arm your soul!  
Build walls  
About your heart!  
Tread softly  
In the day!  
By night,  
Alarums set!  
Look out  
For one and all!

You are alone,  
Poor fool

**Female Voice**

I want only to be loved!

*Crossfade then, male and female, the other verses.*

**Male Voice**

To whom shall I turn today?

**Female Voice**

I want only to be loved!

**Male Voice**

The chains of existence bind me!

**Female Voice**

I want only to be loved!

**Male Voice**

I am trapped in spaces where nothing exists!

**Female Voice**

I want only to be loved!

**Male Voice**

Too often have I been unkindly used!

**Female Voice**

I want only to be loved!

**Male Voice**

Artless are the products of my hands!

**Female Voice**

I want only to be loved!

**Male Voice**

Ask not for quarters in this life!

*The voices interplay alternately in a rising crescendo to a chaotic jumble of agony and despair out of which there finally emerges in clear bell like tones:*

**Female Voice**

I want only to be loved!

*Then each of the others repeats it.*

**Female Voices (individually)**

I want only to be loved!

**Female Voices (in unison, all repeat it, again and again.)**

I want only to be loved!

*There is a moment's silence, and the female voice states it a final time.*

**Female Voice**

I want only to be loved!

*The metronome takes over, ticking out the moments to the new year.*

**Male and Female Voices**

Year's end is upon us!

*The minister rises to continue the service.*

As the year dies,  
As the darkness deepens,  
Let us light this fire.

*The minister goes to the brazier and lights the small candle in it.*

**Female Voice**

Here is the everlasting warmth and safety,  
The ancient campfire—

**Male Voice**  
The hearth of humanity—

**Male Voice**  
The ageless symbol  
That marks the defeat  
Of all the dark forces  
Of existence!

*The minister moves about the circle handing each person a small folded square of paper, then, looking down at his/her own square:*

**Minister**  
Now turn your eyes  
Upon this blank sheet of paper.  
  
Upon it  
Invisibly imprint  
All that  
Which most heavily weighs  
Upon your souls:

**Male Voice**  
All the angers and frustrations—

**Female Voice**  
The sorrows and regrets—

**Male Voice**  
The bitterness and rancor.

**Minister**  
Spell out upon it  
Every hidden thing:

**Female Voice**  
The envy you have felt—

**Male Voice**  
The hate you have given way to—

**Male Voice**  
The weakness of purpose—

**Female Voice**  
All irresolutions—

**Male Voice**  
Each failing,  
Large and small.

**Minister**  
Give it substance  
In the handwriting of your minds.

**Male and Female Voices**  
Exorcise its destructiveness!

**Minister**

Let it pour freely  
From the vats of corrosive thought.

**Male and Female Voices**

Give vent to all that troubles you!

**Minister**

Let spew each thing  
You have harbored in shame,  
For  
Year's end is upon us!

*The minister goes to the brazier.*

And the purifying fire awaits its leavings.

*The minister drops his/her paper slip into the fire and invites others to do the same. All return to their seats*

**Minister**

In these final moments now,  
Let us be cleansed.

Together,  
Take heart in the goodness  
That remains.

For  
This year has not been  
All discontent,  
All failure,  
All frustration.

**Male Voice**

For  
In discontent we have learned to prize the lesser joys of living—

**Female Voice**

In failure we have found meaning in newer goals—

**Male Voice**

In frustration we have discovered ways to live with what is!

**Minister**

For what we have lost  
In days and hours and deeds,  
We have gained in growth and maturity.

For time has no end,

It can be measured,  
It can be labeled,  
It exists only in the human mind.

In your minds then,

Grasp it,  
Measure it,  
Label it for what it is:

**Male Voice**

A period of growth!

**Female Voice**

Of becoming!

**Male Voice**

Of being!

**Minister**

To all the other years,  
Add this year.

Bind them fast  
With new resolution—

Find meaning  
In their substance—

From their combining  
Draw new strength for the year to come—

For  
Year's end is upon us!

**Male and Female Voices**

The New Year is come!

*Recording of loud-clanging cathedral bells. Gradually fade in the metronome, building to a climax. Over them, after a moment, the male and female voices join to sing "Auld Lang Syne."*

*Chimes and metronome out.*

**Minister**

Together now,  
Let us give welcome  
To the New Year  
That stands before us,  
Promising an end  
To winter's rigors

**Female Voice**

In the bustling freshness of another springtime—

**Male Voice**

In the warm and lazy days of summer—

**Male Voice**

In the glories of yet another autumn!

**Minister**

The hard, protective sheath  
We have fashioned about us

Must soon fall off,  
Unneeded.

Let us step out of it,  
Young as this year  
That is upon us!

Like children—all,  
Let us nurture  
The budding hopes  
That shall emerge  
Out of this night's resolves  
For the coming twelvemonth.

Hold fast,  
In the summer to come,  
The flowering joys of love!

**Male Voice**

Of love refreshed—

**Female Voice**

Love sweetened—

**Male Voice**

Love freely given—

**Male and Female Voices**

Love shared!

**Minister**

And  
In the autumnal mellowing  
Of this rich and fertile year  
That lies ahead,  
Surround yourselves  
With the sheaves  
Of your heart's aspiring!

**Female Voice**

Lay up contentment!

**Male Voice**

Stockpile faith!

**Male Voice**

Kindle belief!

**Female Voice**

Be warmed  
In the knowledge  
That you are not alone!

**Minister**

For you are a child of Time  
In the human mind.

And there is no end  
In the ceaseless round  
Of humanity's journeying.

The wax and wane  
Of your spirit  
But reflects  
The continuity  
Of earth and sea,  
Sky and stars.

Therefore,  
Cherish  
What you are  
And  
May yet become.

Keep whole  
Within this circle of friends—

**Male Voice**

Deep in this blessed house—

**Male Voice**

Cradled by the good earth—

**Female Voice**

Wrapped  
In the bundling of the universe!

**Minister**

Together,  
Let us sing.

*House lights up*

Hymn: Prayer for this House  
# 159 in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*  
# 1 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

*House lights off*

**Minister**

Will you please join hands.  
Now,  
Hearts joined,  
Hands clasped,  
Let us be one  
In this, our  
Mutual affirmation:

Will you please repeat the affirmation after me:  
Hear us when we speak,  
For we are not ciphered groundlings  
In our timeless yearnings  
And our ageless dreamings!

Standing in this company of friends  
Unfettered by creed, untouched by dogma,  
We are the glorious sum of every person,  
Reaching out in growing numbers  
Toward the blessed infinity of love  
And the steadfast comfort of unanswerable Eternity!

*They release hands and the minister goes to the brazier.*

The fire burns down—

But, overhead,  
That ever-constant star,  
True North,  
Beckons brightly still!

The beacon of the heavens,  
Unchanging Eternity,

Summons us  
With its cold, clear light!

Together,  
Let us go forth  
Into the shining sweetness  
Of this, the New Year!

**Music:** Trumpet Voluntary

*House lights up. The congregation exits for a glass of champagne, toasting to “A Happy New Year!” with the minister.*

The Service of St. Valentine's

*An Evening Service of Love Proposed, Love Fulfilled in  
Marriage and Marriage Reaffirmed*

by

John Vlahos

**The Service of St. Valentine's**

*An Evening Service of Love Proposed, Love Fulfilled in  
Marriage and Marriage Reaffirmed*

Quotations from:

“How Do I Love Thee?” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning  
“Come Live With Me” by Christopher Marlowe  
“Being Your Slave” by William Shakespeare  
“The Taste of Your Kisses” by Amy Lowell

**Music:** Harpsichord Prelude

**Minister:**

Dearly beloved:  
In this timeless moment,  
Plucked out of the sweet eternity  
That is the human heart,  
And  
In the face of this company,  
Committed to earthly love  
And bound by  
The blessed ties of matrimony,  
Are we gathered here today.

We are come to this place  
As men and women,  
Husbands and wives—  
To sanctify,  
To beautify,  
To adorn anew  
That mystical union  
Of Body and psyche  
Entered into be each of us  
In another time.

Not unadvisedly or lightly,  
But reverently,  
Discreetly,  
Advisedly,  
Soberly,

In awe of the power of love,  
In the expectation  
Of its reviving strength,  
And in need—  
Yearly, in greater need  
Of its cleansing spirit—  
Have we entered into this sanctuary  
That keeps safe and whole  
Our most precious dreams.

We stand now,  
Hand in hand,  
That this estate—  
Made holy by our joining

And given substance daily  
In the freshness of each awakening—  
May be celebrated  
And given deeper meaning  
In the presence of others of our persuasion  
Who would,  
Together,  
Seek the enchantment of re-discovery  
As they give solemn utterance again  
To vows too softly echoing  
In the joyless corridors of our existence.

*The lights come up on the two young readers, male and female, as they contrapuntally alternate stanzas of their poems.*

**Female:**

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

**Male:**

Come live with me and be my love  
And we will all the pleasures prove!

**Female:**

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.

**Male:**

And we will sit upon the rocks  
And see the shepherds feed their flocks  
By shallow rivers to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

**Female:**

I love thee to the level of every day's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.

**Male:**

And I will make thee beds of roses,  
And a thousand fragrant posies!

**Female:**

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right—

**Male:**

A cap of flowers, and a kirtle  
Embroider'd all with leaves or myrtle.

**Female:**

I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.

**Male:**

A gown made of the finest wool  
Which from our pretty lambs we pull!

**Female:**

I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.

**Male:**

Fur-lined slippers for the cold,  
With buckles of the purest gold!

**Female:**

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints—

**Male:**

A belt of straw and ivy buds  
With coral clasps and amber studs!

**Female:**

I love thee with the breath, smiles, tears  
Of all my life!

**Male:**

And if these pleasures may thee move,  
Come live with me and be my Love!

**Female:**

And if God choose, I shall love thee better  
After death!

*Lights out and up on choir*

**Music:** Madrigal

*Lights out and up on minister*

**Minister:**

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.

*Lights out and up on two readers in their twenties*

**Male:**

Bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh art thou,  
Thy fibre, marrow, sinew—thee entire;  
Blood of my blood, and breath of my breath art thou  
So much that, lacking thee, I would expire.

**Female:**

Heart of my heart, and soul of thy soul am I,  
Whose form completed is thine own in mine;  
Love of thy life, and life of thy life am I,  
In whom no spark exists that is not thine.

**Male:**

Encysted thus, two selves divinely blended  
Within one flesh, one corporate being housed,

We are but one till earthly days have ended  
And sleep eternal hath us new-espoused.

**Female:**

And even then my dust with thine shall blend,  
From which love's flow'rs will blossom without end!

**Minister:**

And the Lord God said, because she was taken out of Man, she shall be called Woman. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

**Male:**

All else forsaking, unto thee I cleave,  
For thou art (my wife, my flesh!) as much of me  
As rib of Adam was to pristine Eve  
Whom God created as helpmeet-to-be.  
From father, mother, brother, sister, friend,  
I part, in happy dereliction of  
Old fettering bonds, by forfeiture to end  
Allegiance thus, and reassign my love.

**Female:**

The world disposing, I my self commend  
To thy devices, whims and pleasures sweet;  
My strength, my life, my very soul expend  
To gather fruit forbidden at thy feet.  
And let them take their storied Edens hence—

**Male:**

Your paradise is my heart's preference!

**Organ Music:** "Wedding March"

*Lights out and up on choir*

**Music:** *Segue into folk song, lover's quarrel, one, two, or more voices*

*Lights out and up on two readers in their thirties*

*Male reader's back is turned to the female reader as she begins*

**Female:**

Being your love, what should I do but tend  
Upon the hours and times of your desire?  
I have no precious time at all to spend,  
Nor services to do, till you require  
Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour  
Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you,  
Nor think the bitterness of absence sour,  
When you have bid your servant once adieu.  
Nor dare I question with my jealous thought  
Where you may be, or your affairs suppose,  
But, like a sad slave, stay and think of nought,  
Save, where you are, how happy you make those.  
So true a fool is love, that in your will  
(Though you do anything) he thinks no ill.

*He turns to her, only to have her turn her back to him*

**Male:**

That thou has angered me, I'd not deny;  
I ne'er did say my love for thee was cast  
In such fresh purity, untarnished by  
The baser metals of my youthful past.  
Pure love, I find is but a pallid thing  
If, with it, random faults cannot exist  
Or it be robbed of minor wrongs that bring  
Forgiving kisses we might else have missed.  
What use hath age? To love, what doth it add  
If, from old errors, one cannot be taught  
New lessons and sweet pleasures myriad,  
Without whose savor all would come to naught?  
Look not upon my failings with such pique,  
When I our lasting harmony do seek!

*Relenting, she turns to go into his arms as...*

*Lights out and up on minister*

**Minister:**

So God created humankind in his own image, male and female created he them. And God blessed them and said unto them, be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. For, lo, as arrows in the hand of a mighty man are his children. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them.

*Lights out and up on mature readers; the woman preferably pregnant*

*They stand apart, voicing their separate thoughts,*

**Female:**

Great with child, our child, I am become!

**Male:**

Great with child, our child, she is become!

**Female:**

Child of our joining, and of our yearning, in me it grows!

**Male:**

Child of my loins, and of my yearning, in her it grows!

**Female:**

Great with child, our child, I am become!

**Male:**

Great with child, our child, is she become!

**Female** *A look at him:*

Straight as an arrow, like him may it be!

**Male:**

Straight as an arrow, like me may it—  
*Stopping short and amending it as he looks on her and then crosses to her*  
Slender as a cornstalk, like you may it be!

**Female:**

Great with child, your child, am I become!

**Male shaking his head:**

Great with child, our child, are you become!

**Female:**

Child of your loins, and of your yearning, in me it grows!

**Male shaking his head once more:**

Child of our joining and our yearning, in you it grows!

**Female taking his hands in hers, exultantly:**

Great with child, our child, am I become!

*Lights out and up on minister*

**Minister:**

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Therefore live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.

*Lights out and up on mature readers*

*She is standing to one side as he studies her*

**Male:**

Looking on thee this morn when thou didst wake,  
No alteration found I in thy face;  
The passing year no withering change could make  
Nor of thy essence one small jot erase.  
All that thou wast that first I loved in thee,  
Unchanged shines as fairly as before;  
Indeed, has grown with such intensity  
That, yearly, I am smitten more and more.  
Yet, were this somehow other than it seems—  
Wert thou by chance to change, as change you may—  
That image still would vivify my dreams  
By night, and would my soul sustain by day.  
All that thou art perennially blooms in me,  
As all I am must ever flower through thee.

*They shift now, into a reversal of positions*

**Female:**

At the first, you were like red wine and honey,  
And the taste of your kisses burnt my mouth with its sweetness.  
Now they are like morning bread,  
Smooth and pleasant,  
I hardly taste them at all, for I know their savour;  
But I am completely nourished.

*Lights out and up on choir*

**Music:** Liebeslied

*Lights out and up on minister*

**Minister:**

One more year  
The love-song day is come!

Day of re-dedication,  
Day of fresh avowals,  
Day of St. Valentine's!

One more year  
The love-song day is come!

*Lights out and up on older readers*

**Male:**

But one more year let me bewitched be!  
Another twelvemonth work  
Thine alchemies of love!

**Female:**

Lest I do languish empty,  
Let me be thine—when e'er, where e'er you please,  
But let me, one more year, full circle come:  
In thy embracings round to take from thee  
The life-sustaining energies all love in me!

**Male:**

I cannot live and dream—a man entire—  
Alone, apart, all life in self contained;  
With thee must I to every height aspire—

**Female:**

With thee find comfort in each dream attained!

**Male and Female** *turning to the congregation:*

Look not for other meaning 'twixt these lines  
Save this: that all are one, this Valentine's!

**Minister:**

Therefore,  
In this last, long, wintry month  
Are we joined  
To give festival  
With hearts and with flowers.

Now are we gathered  
To shake off  
What winter weariness  
Besets  
Our married state.

Let us, then,  
Each vow repeat  
In tender presagement  
Of love renewed—  
Renewed  
Toward yet another  
Springtime:

Time of birdsong  
And apple blossoms,  
Soft words,  
Warm sentiments,  
Gentle glancings,  
And the quiet holding of hands.

**Music:** *Husbands and wives sing “Drink to me Only With Thine Eyes”*

*The minister (if married) is joined by his/her spouse*

**Minister:**

Will each husband repeat after me:

I give thee this rose  
As token of my heart,  
Keep it with thine  
That it may make us one.

Will each wife now repeat after me:

I give thee this rose  
As token of my heart,  
That you may hold it dear  
As I hold thine.

By this exchange,  
Be joined anew  
As man and wife.

Guided each  
By the other’s heart  
Which  
Sweetly now  
In each abides.

Finding comfort  
In its warmth—

Long life  
In its strength—

Happiness  
In its presence.

With a kiss then,  
Let the bargain be sealed!

*The couples kiss*

Will you join hands—

And,  
Hand in hand,  
Walk forth in beauty now  
To the sound of music  
And  
In the name of love!

**Music:** Trumpet Voluntary

*Sanctuary lights up*

*The couples recess, led by the minister to where glasses of champagne await them and are led in a toast by the minister*

**Minister:**

Together  
On this fairest of all nights—  
In remembrance of  
Years past,  
Found joys,  
Sweet lessons learned—  
Let us drink.

Let us drink  
To one another

To lovers  
Of all times

To the pleasures  
And insights  
Of love

And  
The meaning of love  
Yet to be tasted

In the years to come!

*All drink in toast*

**Music:** The Anniversary Waltz

*May conclude with dancing*

The Agape Feast

*A Service in the Round*

*Including an optional section for the welcoming of new members*

by

John Vlahos

## The Agape Feast

### A Service in the Round

Notes: *If your sanctuary has moveable chairs they should be cleared and tables set up in a large "circle" with chairs only on the outer circumference so people are facing each other.*

*John Vlahos and Ed Lane had many discussions about the concept of agape. Ed's synthesis of those discussions will be found at the end of the service along with his more detailed suggestions regarding the setting and the rubric for the service.*

#### **Shalom Havayreem** (sung as a round)

# 160 in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*

# 400 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

#### **Prayer: Navaho Corn Meal Ritual**

*The minister sprinkles corn about the circumference of the circle.*

#### **Minister:**

May it be delightful, this house.  
From our heads, may it be delightful,  
To our feet, may it be delightful,  
All above us may it be delightful,  
All around us may it be delightful.

May it be delightful for our children:  
May all be well.

May it be delightful with our food:  
May all be well.

All our possessions:  
Well may they be made to increase.

May it be delightful, this house.  
May all be well.

#### **Reading from Zoroaster:**

O Maker of the material world, thou holy one: What means the food that fills the religion of Mazda? Ahura Mazda answered: He who sows corn sows righteousness and life. He makes the religion of Mazda walk and breathe. From this food comes the strength to do good works of holiness. From this food comes the strength to beget children. From the feasting of the people comes righteousness and rebirth.

#### **Reading from the Eleusinian Mystery Religions:**

On the second day, the people went from Eleusis to the nearby shores, there to be cleansed—carrying with them the festival fare, for it too had to be sea-washed, to be made immaculate and purified of evil by the Mother-Sea before it could be eaten. Dressed in new clothes, the young ones, crowned with myrtle wreaths, all the families gathered for the sacred pageant, to hear the words spoken and the songs sung. To partake of new grain and the fruits of the season that they might experience the new life together in the yearly bounties of Demeter and the life-giving properties of the sacred grape.

**Reading from the New Testament:**

And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, "With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you." And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves." And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them saying, "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me." Likewise also the cup, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

*From the table before him the minister indicates and lifts up each for all to see:*

Minister:

Brown grain,  
Red fruit,  
Green and yellow vegetables—

These are the colors of earth.

We taste of them,  
Are succored by them.

Calendars have been fashioned  
Out of their sowing  
And their harvesting.

Each day's span  
Is broken and given meaning  
By our pausing  
To take food,  
To be strengthened  
And sustained  
By this rainbow renewal  
Of our lifelong need.

So central is this need,  
So common to us all,  
That people of all time  
Have endowed its sharing  
With special significance.

One's allies were "men of thy bread"  
In biblical times.

In ancient Libya,  
Each gave the other to drink  
Out of his hand  
In token of love.

The word for "family"  
In Gaelic  
Denotes those who eat together.

One who shares bread with another  
Is the meaning of our own word  
For companion.

In whatever place,  
When a stranger comes  
He is fed.

We welcome our kin  
With festive boards.

For the prodigal,  
There was the fatted calf.

Feast days follow periods of mourning.

Weddings, baptisms,  
All the great and small occasions  
Of our lifetime  
Are consecrated at the board.

Testimonials are tendered  
At banquet tables.

Goodies are a primary reward  
For children.

All these:—

The love-feast of the early Christians,  
Sharing agape with one another  
In clandestine suppers  
Shadowed by death.

Potluck and picnic.

Cookout and Diners Club.

All serve to fill a basic need  
That is more than mere sustenance.

It is the gathering-together  
To share in the psychic security  
Of food and drink  
That we cling to  
From birth to death.

That makes of parents  
Good breadwinners and bringers-home-of-bacon,  
Presiding spirits of the family table.

That creates  
Well-fed nations.

The gourmet status symbol.

The well-stocked freezer.

Fat babies.

And the happy harvest.

In this need,  
This greater need  
To establish ties of love and kinship—  
Together,  
To absorb a common substance  
And find life-giving power  
In its essence.

In this need,  
We are one.

Through this sharing,  
We shall become one.

Because of it,  
We are gathered here tonight.

Waiting.

Waiting,  
Through this age-old,  
This utterly common,  
This singularly universal ritual,  
To become men of our bread,  
True companions,  
Family.

*The following section is used when the Agape Feast includes welcoming new members of the church:*

It is  
Our particular rite  
For the welcoming  
Of the newcomers—  
Those lately come into our midst  
To partake with us  
The fruit of our questing.

They have  
Newly-come unto us  
As strangers.

Let them stand now—

To be recognized  
And to be welcomed.

*The newcomers rise at their places.*

Now,  
Let all others rise:  
Charter members,  
Those others newly-come  
In all the intervening years.

*All others rise at their places.*

As separate families,  
We have come.

Members of this church family  
We are gathered now.  
In this surmounting kinship,  
Let us all join hands  
In common prayer.

*All join hands to form an unbroken circle.*

**Prayer** repeated after the minister by all:

Hand in hand, we stand together.  
Hand in hand, our hearts are joined.  
Blessed be this humble table.  
Blessed be this circle of our love.

*They release hands.*

You are joined now!

Never to rise again  
As newcomer,  
As charter member,  
As any other.

Be seated now.

Share now  
In this family gathering,  
The essence behind name and way of life,  
Position, and place.

*[End of section for welcoming new members.]*

*The minister lifts up a loaf of bread and breaks it as he speaks.*

Let us first  
Break bread,  
And with this staff of life  
(Preservatives to retard spoilage notwithstanding)  
Let us partake  
Of earth and seed,  
Sun and rain,  
And the substance of eternal human toil.

*The minister passes the bread to those on either side. The others do likewise.*

Let now  
The fruit of the vine  
Be poured:  
The blood-red symbol  
Of human mortality  
And resurrection.

*The minister pours the wine or fruit juice. The others do likewise.*

For  
At each year's warming,  
It bursts forth anew,  
Giving increase to earth  
Even as we do  
With our children  
And our children's children.

For this is humankind's universal communion—

Whether in Jesus' name  
Or Osiris',  
Or an Aztec deity—

This sacramental breaking of bread  
And pouring of wine,  
Ritualized and celebrated  
In all the many centuries  
Of our being.

In cave and hut,  
Tent or temple,  
Apartment or split-level,  
This is our eternal seeking  
To crystallize,  
To give form,  
To celebrate the kinship of love and the family of the heart.

With joy and good cheer,  
In the lightness of laughter  
And the intimacy of good talk,  
Let us eat together—

Passing the bread of life  
To one another,

Holding the glasses  
Filled with the sweet liquid of rebirth  
To each other's lips.

Together,  
In good appetite,  
Let us celebrate!

*The meal begins. When it is ended the minister continues.*

The meal is finished.

With the sweetness  
Of earth's fair bounty  
Lingering on our lips,  
Let us stand silently,  
Hand in hand once more,  
And reflect  
On the eternal goodness  
Of this planet's yield

And the enduring sweetness  
Of love  
Between woman and man,  
Parent and child,  
Brothers and friends.

*All rise and join hands.*

The hungerings  
Of body and spirit  
Fed,  
Let us return  
To our own family circles.

Bearing with us  
The memory of this communal handclasp  
And the fulfillment of this universal longing.

Knowing  
That in this holding of hands  
And this sharing of sustenance,  
We have become  
Indissolubly one.

Knowing  
That no longer  
Are we alone  
And strangers.

Knowing  
That we are indeed  
Family!

**Hymn: May Nothing Evil Cross This Door**

# 159 in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*

# 1 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

*At the conclusion of the hymn, following the ancient custom of the early Agape Feasts, families will share with one another the kiss of peace as a token of our love for one another.*

## **The History and Meaning of Agape**

by Edwin A. Lane

*Agape* is one of three Greek words for “love” in the New Testament. Its earliest known use is in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament made in the third century B.C.E. It is used only twice in the Synoptics (Matthew 24:12 and Luke 11:42), often in John and the Pauline writings (including the ten references to “love” in I Corinthians 13) and in the Johannine epistles. The other Greek terms for love are *eros*, referring to sensual attraction and from which the word “erotic” is derived; and *philoque*, referring to a caring, ethical love and from which the word “Philadelphia,” the city of brotherly love, is derived. *Agape* is generally used in reference to the divine/human love relationship, but occasionally is used for the very special love relationship among human beings within the early Christian community. It is used in this context in I Corinthians 13.

Unfortunately, it was translated into Latin as *caritas*, the origin of our English word, “charity,” leading to that incorrect translation of I Corinthians 13 in the King James Version. But this error was not made in any of the other KJV references where it is correctly translated as “love.”

The Agape Feast was a love feast in the early church community in which men, women, and children, both slaves and masters, all took part. Although its origin is uncertain it was probably a simple and natural commemoration of the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples which was a communal passover meal. The Agape Feast was a regular part of the Essene community and is described in one of the non-biblical Dead Sea Scrolls.

The early Agape Feasts culminated in the celebration of the Eucharist. It was a social symbol of the equality and solidarity among the members of the congregation and it ended with the exchange of the kiss of love. In 391 A.D. the Council of Carthage decreed that the Eucharist should be taken fasting which separated it from the agape communal meal. Later councils banned the Agape Feast from the church buildings altogether—perhaps because the word got around among the Roman soldiers about the kiss at the end and they—unaware of the difference between *agape* and *eros*—began coming to the Agape Feasts in order to kiss the Christian girls.

Our Agape Feast, in reuniting the bread and wine of the Eucharist with the communal meal of the Passover, restores that union of the original Agape, and in so doing also restores the linkage of the Passover meal of Judaism with the Eucharist of Christianity. Tonight we celebrate agape, not in its original form which is unknown, but in restoration of its original intent of symbolizing equality and solidarity within this community of faith. And I invite you, even if you are neither a Roman soldier nor a “Christian girl” to exchange a kiss of love and peace at the conclusion of the service.

### **The Setting of the Tables**

Tables are set up in a square or rectangle so people are facing each other during the service and the meal. Take out any empty chairs so there are no gaps in the “circle.”

The table is covered with paper. All food is finger food so there are no plates or flatware. The chicken is served on paper plates and the wine and/or cranberry juice is served in paper cups. All other food is simply spread around the table directly on the paper table covering. You need an abundance of good quality napkins!

One beauty of this is that when the leftover food and beverages are removed from the table the paper covering, cups, napkins, chicken bones, peanut shells, etc. are just rolled up and thrown away. Cleanup is minimal!

### **The Food**

Colors are important—note the text of the service. Food is spread around the table so everyone can reach it with little passing.

Chicken wings, thighs, and drumsticks.

Boiled shrimp.

Raw Vegetables: snow peas, broccoli spears, baby carrots, celery, cauliflower, green beans, cherry tomatoes, peanuts in the shell. (Green, yellow, and brown colors)

Raw Fruit: apples, grapes (different colors), bananas, pears, figs, dates, etc.

Cheese: a couple of varieties cut into bite-sized cubes

Bread: whole wheat, unsliced (baked on a flat surface, not in a loaf pan)

Beverages: red wine and/or cranberry juice (only red beverages)

Paper bowls of yellow corn meal around the table, about one every five places at the table

Paper finger bowls with water for clean up.

### **Rubrics**

Introduce the service with comments on the background of agape.

People in the circle can be given the three readings to do.

The flow and ambiance of the service is enhanced if people can be given the following information at the beginning so the service and meal can proceed without announcements.

1. There are times in the service when the leader(s) of the service sprinkle corn meal on the table, break bread, and pour wine or cranberry juice. Those seated next to those items around the table should do likewise.

2. Most of the mealtime itself is devoted to conversation with one another. Please resist the urge to talk during or between segments of the ritual. If the leader has to call you back to worship to continue the service the ambiance is broken.

The Flower Communion

*Including an optional section for child dedication*

by

John Vlahos

## The Flower Communion

### Prelude

### Opening Words—Call to the Congregation

#### Minister:

Now let the summer rains  
Our wintry grime of soul  
Cleanse full away!

Our spattered spirits  
Let us hang  
Upon some common clothesline—  
There to dry—  
Under a universal sun  
To soak, to soak  
In hot, galactic emanations.

Like flexing toes  
In springtime ooze,  
Release your minds  
And stretch their span.

Reach out  
For rainbow vistas  
Soon to come.

Let blow  
The winds of love  
On strangers  
Passing by.

And  
Make your peace  
With me.

For  
I will not,  
I cannot be  
Denied!

#### Doxology:

Give praise for all the flowers that grow,  
Praise every living thing you know,  
Let earth resound with songs of praise,  
With love let summer fill your days.

#### Young Reader:

In the beginning, awash with the amniotic fluid of the universe— humankind emerged from the dark, warm, womblike depths of the uterine sea, forever orphaned by our instinctual, upward striving.

We have walked—in countless centuries since—upon this good green earth, calling her “Mother” out of some ancient and persistent memory.

And now, in tentative yearning, we reach out again—this time toward the whirling infinity of space, toward the very spore-banks of Eternity—bravely seeking that which fathered us in the beginning. Yet, evermore, will earth remain our home, for we are bound to it by every atom and element of our being.

Long before scientists first told us that in our blood the saline content reflects the selfsame content of the sea, we knew from whence we came. Caught up each year in the washing sea-tides of summer, we have murmured in our hearts to her—again and again—we be of one blood, sister, thou and I!

And though we have been told that a single atom of iron in hemoglobin and one small atom of magnesium in chlorophyll are all that separate our lifestream from that of the trees of the wood, yet we have always known the truth. Since Time's beginning, walking under the green-leaved canopy of the sheltering forest, we have reached out to lay a hand upon the smooth flank of a beech, saying in our innermost selves—we be of one blood, thou and I. We be of one blood!

**Round:** “Sweet the Evening Air of May”

**Reading**

Donald Culross Peattie

**Minister:**

What we love, when on a summer day we step into the coolness of a wood, is that its boughs close up behind us. We are escaped, into another room of life. The wood does not live as we live, restless and running, panting after flesh, and even in sleep tossing with fears. It is aloof from thoughts and instincts; it responds, but only to the sun and wind, the rock and the stream—never, though you shout yourself hoarse, to propaganda, temptation, reproach, or promises. You cannot mount a rock and preach to a tree how it shall attain the kingdom of heaven. It is already closer to it, up there, than you will ever be.

**Anthem** “How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place”

*Brahms*

**Responsive Reading**

**All:** Walking in Woods,  
I grow young again.

**Minister:** My step grows light  
In the company of finches:

**Cong:** A barefoot path opens before me.

**Minister:** In dew-sweet expectation, I turn  
My face with daffodils toward the sun:

**Cong:** Its mothering warmth suckles my spirit.

**Minister:** The season's first perfuming arises  
Out of the loamy eternity of morning-moistened earth:

**Cong:** I am root-fed in innocence.

**Minister:** Chipmunks scurry underfoot;  
They lead me through the underbrush of my desiring;

**Cong:** I relearn the wisdom of childhood.

**Minister:** Petal-light rain cleanses my being;  
I am awash with Spring.

**Cong:** The years fall away from me.

**All:** Walking in the woods,  
I grow young again.

**Hymn 21** For the Beauty of the Earth  
#21 *Singing the Living Tradition*  
#12 *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*

**Bringing of the Flowers**

**Minister:**  
Let the flowers be brought forward now.

*Young people bring in flower baskets.*

We have brought these flowers here today in a common cause—that, through them, we may come to know one another—take home some part of one another—touch the hearts of one another.

**Female Chorus:**  
If we look deep into the heart of a flower,  
The rose is more rose—  
The violet more violet—  
The buttercup a deeper yellow.  
And if we look deep into the heart of those beside us,  
More human they are than they seem—  
More living than they themselves know.

**Male Chorus:**  
Let these flowers of earth  
Made ever more fragrant  
By the touch of those who brought them,  
Bridge our hearts this day  
And fill our senses  
With the brimming joys of life!

**Hymn 63** Spring Has Now Unwrapped the Flowers  
#63 *Singing the Living Tradition*  
#321 *Hymns of the Spirit*

*[The following section may be used when desired for a child naming ceremony.]*

**Minister:**  
“And out of the ground, the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.”

**Choral Voices:**  
In the beginning was not the word.  
  
In the beginning,  
Inarticulate folk danced.  
  
They danced!  
  
Invoking the gods of the wood and the cave.  
  
Exorcising the spirit demons

Of sickness and of death.

In supplication and in protest,  
They danced!

Seeking to give form  
To nameless fears  
And unutterable yearnings.

Calling them at last  
By their names—

Secret names.

Terrible names.

Filling the caves  
With the sound  
Of their names.

Of their names!

**Minister:**

For that which is named is known,  
And that which is known is possessed.  
And being possessed, merges with those who call upon it,  
And becomes one with them!

**Choral Voices:**

And they called themselves by name.

Shouting the name.

Singing the name

Dancing the name

Growing  
In the echoing power  
Of their names.

Of their names.

**Minister:**

For to have a name, is to come alive,  
And in aliveness, we grow,  
In growth, find strength,  
In strength, aspire,  
In aspiration, know love,  
And in love, are fulfilled!

**Choral Response**

**Minister:**

Will you bring forward the child to be named.

*Parents come forward with the child.*

**Minister:**

We gather now to celebrate the naming of one of our young—those budlike flowers of man and woman—that we may, by the dear magic of (his/her) name summon (him/her) gently into our midst and make (him/her) one with us. We welcome (him/her) in the name of all people.

**Female Chorus:**

In the names of Clara Barton and Susan B. Anthony, of Abigail Adams and Eleanor Roosevelt.

**Male Chorus:**

In the names of Jesus Christ and Mohandas Gandhi, of Francis of Assisi—of Michael Servetus—and of Abraham Lincoln.

**All:**

Great men and women, common men and women. All join us here.

*The minister turns to the child and its parents.*

**Minister:**

You have brought unto us a child,  
Born to you out of your joining,

In love and in aspiration—

**Male and Female Chorus:**

A child in which we look one day to find  
The best of two good friends combined;  
A fused perfection and a happy blend  
Of all that does (his/her) parents recommend.

**Minister:**

You have brought this child to us now, to be named in the presence of this company of friends, that (he/she) may—by this naming become part of a larger family.

*The minister turns to the congregation.*

Will the congregation join me in the congregational pledge.

**All:**

As you have pledged yourselves to the blessings and uncertainties of this child's upbringing, so do we pledge ourselves—to cherish (his/her) sweet presence and to share with (him/her) that which we are and would become.

*The minister turns to the parents again.*

**Minister:**

Will you call out (his/her) name for all to hear.

*The parents announce the child's name.*

**Minister:**

In the name of this congregation, with the gift of this flower, plucked from the earth that is our home, and with this water from the sea—mother of us all—I welcome you, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, into the fellowship of all humankind.

*The minister presents the flower and anoints the child with the sea water.*

**Minister:**

It has been said that an infant is like an empty book in which anything may be written. This, together, we would wish for (him/her). With these high hopes would we fill (his/her) waiting mind.

*The minister turns again to the congregation.*

Will you join me now in the congregational blessing.

**All:**

May you love only that which is good.  
May you seek and attain that good.  
May you learn to be gentle.  
May you keep tame that which rages within us all.  
May you respect yourself.  
May you never once be used up.  
May you wish for happiness for all people.  
May you envy none.  
May you win no victory that harms either yourself or another.  
May you never fail your fellows.  
May you know good men and women all the days of your life.  
May you follow in their footsteps.  
May you give sympathy to all and by your actions lessen the tides of sorrow.  
May you add to the sum of human happiness.  
May you come to know that which is eternal.  
May it ever abide with you.

**Choral Amen**

**Hymn** A Blessing

*#263 in Hymns for the Celebration of Life  
Not in Singing Our History*

*[End of the Child Naming Ceremony]*

**The Passing of the Flowers**

**Female Chorus:**

We enter now into the sweetness of summer:  
The willow trails her golden skirts,  
Clouds of blossoms are all about us,  
The rose petal days are coming.

**Minister:**

Thus we gather  
To celebrate the changing seasons—  
With these tokens of ourselves  
Heaped high before us.

They serve us now  
In brotherly and sisterly communion.

**Male and Female Chorus:**

For we are all children of earth.  
The soil sustains us all.  
Each flower and stem,  
Leaf and root,

Knows you and me.  
And knows love—  
Even as we do.

**Minister:**

Now let the flowers be passed  
From hand to hand.

*The flowers are passed through the pews to the congregation.*

**Minister:**

Together now,  
Let us join in prayer.

**Unison Congregational Prayer**

Francis of Assisi

Make me, I pray, a channel of peace,  
That where there is hatred, I may bring love,  
That where there is wrong I may bring the spirit of forgiveness,  
That where there is discord, I may bring harmony,  
That where there is error, I may bring truth,  
That where there is doubt, I may bring faith,  
That where there is despair, I may bring hope,  
That where there are shadows, I may bring light,  
That where there is sadness, I may bring joy.

Grant that I may seek rather  
To comfort, than to be comforted,  
To understand, than to be understood,  
To love, than to be loved.  
For it is by giving that we receive,  
It is by self-forgetting that we find,  
It is by forgiving that we are forgiven,  
It is by dying that we awaken to eternal life.  
Amen.

**Hymn of Saint Francis**

**All:** All creatures of the earth and sky,  
Come, kindred, lift your voices high,  
Alleluia, Alleluia!  
Bright burning sun with golden beam,  
Soft shining moon with silver gleam:  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

**Cong:** Swift rushing wind so wild and strong,  
**Choir:** White clouds that sail in heav'n along,  
**Cong:** Alleluia,  
**Choir:** Alleluia!  
**Cong:** Fair rising morn in praise rejoice,  
**Choir:** High stars of evening, find a voice:  
**Cong:** Alleluia, Alleluia,  
**Choir:** Alleluia, Alleluia,  
**All:** Alleluia!

**Cong:** Cool flowing water, pure and clear,  
**Choir:** Make music for all life to hear,

**Cong:** Alleluia,  
**Choir:** Alleluia!  
**Cong:** Dance, flame of fire, so strong and bright,  
**Choir** and bless us with your warmth and light:  
**Cong:** Alleluia, Alleluia,  
**Choir** Alleluia, Alleluia,  
**All:** Alleluia!

**All:** Embracing earth, you, day by day,  
Bring forth your blessings on our way,  
Alleluia, Alleluia!  
All herbs and fruits that richly grow,  
Let them the glory also show:  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

**All:** All you of understanding heart,  
Forgiving others, take your part,  
Alleluia, Alleluia!  
Let all things now the Holy bless,  
And worship God in humbleness:  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

### **Benediction**

#### **Minister:**

The flowers have returned to us.  
Like flowers  
Let us now stand—  
Rain cleansed and root proud—  
To receive the goodness of earth  
That is all about us.  
Like flowers let us become.  
Flowers among people.  
People among flowers.  
Thou in me,  
And I in thee.

### **Choral Amen**

### **Postlude**

Simple Gifts

*A Service for Mid Summer*

by

John Vlahos

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**2006**

**Simple Gifts**

*A Service for Mid-Summer*

**Prelude**

**Minister:**

We enter, each year,  
Into the womb of summer.  
Looking ahead  
To that needed re-birth  
Of spirit,  
Of being,  
Of self.

The sun  
In its daily course  
Warms us  
As in no other season.

Rains refresh us—

Nights enchant us—

Summer mornings  
Come a-borning

Filled with birdsong  
And rose-scent—

Moist-eyed with dew—

Fresher than daisies—

Soft as a sunrise—

As glorious as a tree!

And we gather here,  
On a day such as this,  
Caught up  
In summer's flowering,  
Green-growing magic—

To celebrate  
Its eternal presence  
Under this arching,  
Wood-hewn roof.

For we are  
In the very midst of summer  
And,  
As the dog days  
Fill us with sweet lethargy,  
We know it is

Summertime,  
Summertime,  
Summertime!

**Vocal:** "Summertime" Gershwin

**Reader:**

To every thing there is a season,  
And a time to every purpose under heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die;  
A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;  
A time to break down, and a time to build up;  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
A time to get, and a time to lose;  
A time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
A time to love, and a time to hate;  
A time of war, and a time of peace.

For, lo, the winter is past,  
The rain is over and gone;  
The flowers appear on the earth;  
The time of the singing of birds is come—  
And the voice of the turtledove is heard in our heart.

So, now is it good and comely  
For one to eat and to drink,  
And to enjoy the good of all our labour  
That we take under the sun  
All the days of our lives, which God giveth us:  
For it is our portion.

Therefore,  
Go thy way,  
Eat thy bread with joy,  
Drink thy wine with a merry heart,  
Live joyfully with the one whom thou lovest,  
And whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,  
Do it with all thy might!

And make a joyful noise unto the Lord!

Come before God's presence  
In thanks and in praise,  
With gladness and with singing!

**Hymn:** "For Flowers That Bloom About Our Feet"  
#76 in *Singing the Living Tradition*  
#30 in *Hymns of the Spirit*

**Minister:**

For lovers,  
Summer is the sacred season  
Of the heart

And all its days  
With but one person  
Start

Brim-full  
Of mystic vows

Of hopeful quests  
For earthly joys

Of fiercest heights

And direst depths

Of plain gold rings

Green circlet wreaths

The churches promises  
A tenor sings—

And all in search  
Of some sweet, magic way  
In which two lives  
Eternally to bind

In  
One  
Eternal  
Kiss!

**Reader:**

Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night  
Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight:  
And Lo! the Hunter of the East has caught  
The sultan's turret in a Noose of Light.

So come with me and leave the Wise  
To talk; one thing is certain, that Life flies;  
One thing is certain, and the Rest is lies;  
Love lives, though Summer's Flower dies.

Ah, Love! could thou and I with Fate conspire  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,  
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then  
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

Away with words:—  
What boots it to repeat  
How Time is slipping underneath our Feet:  
Unborn Tomorrow and dead Yesterday,  
Why fret about them if Today be sweet!

Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,  
A flask of Wine, a Book of Verse—and Thou

Beside me singing in the Wilderness,  
And Wilderness is Paradise enow.

Ah! my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears  
Today of past Regrets and future Fears—  
Tomorrow?—Why. Tomorrow I may be  
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years!

**Vocal:** "Who Knows Where the Time Goes?"

**Minister:**

The children know the summer best.

They greet each morning  
In its purity  
As if it were  
But newly-made  
And made for them alone.

With innocent indolence,  
For hours they lie  
On grassy slopes  
And contemplate the sky.

They root in earth  
And revel in  
The loamy wealth  
We sometimes call "unclean."

They talk to birds,  
Embrace the trees,  
Make braids of flowers  
Intermixed with weeds.

They take to water  
As the fish in the sea,  
Calling her "Mother"  
In their wise secrecy.

They hear music in streams  
And hum with the wind,  
Know the yearnings of hills  
And feel holy in woods.

The face of a meadow  
Fills their souls with a joy  
That human faces  
In time will alloy.

The children, the children  
Know the summer the best—

As they play at their games  
And fairy tales weave  
Out of earth's simple bounties  
And their own honest zest.

**Vocal:** “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”

*A group of children enter hand-in-hand and pantomime the action as “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” is sung by a junior choir or by the children.*

*The children also pantomime the action as “Ring Around the Rosie” is sung:*

“Ring Around the Rosie”

Ring around the rosie,  
A pocket full of posies,  
A-tishoo! A-tishoo!  
We all fall down.

The cows are in the meadow  
Lying fast asleep,  
A-tishoo! A-Tishoo!  
We all get up again.

*The children finish their pantomime and to their places after taking their bows*

*Two boys pantomime the action as the reader reads from Mark Twain’s Tom Sawyer. Or the boys may memorize and speak the lines:*

**Reader:**

Saturday morning was come, and all the summer world was bright and fresh, and brimming with life. There was a song in every heart; and if the heart was young the music issued at the lips. There was cheer in every face and a spring in every step. The locust trees were in bloom and the fragrance of the blossoms filled the air. Cardiff Hill, beyond the village and above it, was green with vegetation, and it lay just far enough away to seem a Delectable Lane, dreamy, reposeful, and inviting.

*Tom Sawyer enters.*

Tom appeared on the sidewalk with a bucket of whitewash and a long handled brush. He surveyed the fence, and all gladness left him and a deep melancholy settled down upon his spirit. Thirty years of board fence nine feet high. Life seemed to him hollow, and existence but a burden. Sighing, he dipped his brush and passed it along the topmost plank; repeated the operation, did it again; compared the insignificant whitewashed streak with the far-reaching continent of unwhitewashed fence, and sat down on a tree-box discouraged.

He began to think of the fun he had planned for this day, and his sorrows multiplied. Soon the free boys would come tripping along on all sorts of delicious expeditions, and they would make a world of fun of him for having to work. The very thought of it burnt him like fire. He got out his worldly wealth and examined it—bits of toys, marbles, and trash; enough to buy an exchange of work, may be, but not half enough to buy so much as half an hour of pure freedom. So he returned his straitened means to his pocket, and gave up the idea of trying to buy the boys. At this dark and hopeless moment, an inspiration burst upon him! Nothing less than a great, magnificent inspiration.

He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work. *Bern Rogers enters.* Ben Rogers hove in sight presently—the very boy, of all boys, whose ridicule he had been dreading. Ben’s gait was the hop-skip-and-jump. Proof enough that his heart was light and his anticipation high. He was eating an apple, and giving a long, melodious whoop, at intervals, followed by a deep-toned ding-dong-dong, ding-dong-dong, for he was impersonating a steamboat.

“Stop her, sir! Ting-a-ling-ling! Set her back on the starboard! Ting-a-ling-ling! Chow-ch-chow-chow! Shhhhhhhhh-t”

Tom went on whitewashing—paid no attention to the steamboat. Ben stared a moment and then said:

“Say—I’m going in a-swimming, I am. Don’t you wish you could? But of course you’d druther work—wouldn’t you? Course you would!”

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said: “What do you call work?”

“Why, ain’t that work?”

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly: “Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain’t. All I know is, it suits Tom Sawyer.”

“O, come now, you don’t mean to let on that you like it?”

The brush continued to move. “Like it? Well, I don’t see why I oughtn’t to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?”

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth—stepped back to note the effect—added a touch here and there—criticized the effect again—Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed. Finally he said: “Say tom, let me whitewash a little.”

Tom considered, was about to consent; but he altered his mind.

“No—no—I reckon it wouldn’t hardly do, Ben. You see, Aunt Polly’s awful particular about this fence—right here on the street, you know—but if it was the back fence I wouldn’t mind and she wouldn’t. Yes, she’s awful particular about this fence; it’s got to be done very careful; I reckon there ain’t one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, that can do it the way it’s got to be done.”

“No—is that so? O come, now—lemme just try. Only just a little—I’d let you, if it was me, Tom.”

“Ben, I’d like to, honest injun; but Aunt Polly—well Jim wanted to do it, but she wouldn’t let him; Sid wanted to do it, and she wouldn’t let Sid. Now don’t you see how I’m fixed? If you was to tackle this fence and anything was to happen to it—”

“Oh, shucks, I’ll be just as careful. Now lemme try. Say—I’ll give you the core of my apple.”

“Well, here—No, Ben, now don’t. I’m afeard—”

“I’ll give you all of it!”

Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while the late steamer Big Missouri worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents.

There was no lack of material; boys happened along every little while; they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash. By the time Ben was fagged out, Tom had traded the next chance to Billy Fisher for a kite, in good repair; and when he played out, Johnny Miller bought in for a dead rat and a string to swing it with—and so on, and so on, hour after hour.

And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth. He had, besides the things before mentioned, twelve marbles, part of a jew’s-harp, a piece of blue bottle-glass to look through, a spool cannon, a key that wouldn’t unlock

anything, a fragment of chalk, a glass stopper of a decanter, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six firecrackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass door knob, a dog collar—but no dog—the handle of a knife, four pieces of orange peel, and a dilapidated old window-sash.

He had a nice, good, idle time all the while—plenty of company—and the fence had three coats of whitewash on it! If he hadn't run out of whitewash, he would have bankrupted every boy in the village.

Tom said to himself that it was not such a hollow world, after all. He had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it—namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain.

If he had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do.

### Barbershop Quartet

**Community Sing:** *See attached song sheet for suggested songs*

#### Minister:

It was a happy time:  
A time of innocence  
A time of inexpressible vigor,

A sentimental time—

Perhaps  
A foolish time.

We had life by the throat,  
And the world at our feet—

And  
In our prodigal optimism  
We dared to believe  
That it would never,  
Ever  
End.

#### Reader:

Walking barefoot  
Across parking lots,  
My toes yearning for the feel  
Of anachronistic cobbles,  
I avoid imaginary cracks  
That break a mother's back,  
As well as figmentary lines  
That snap a father's spine,  
And I despise you,  
Pourers of glacial blacktop!  
You have robbed me,  
Robbed us all  
Of peripatetic games,  
Leaving us only  
These ebon stretches  
Of goo!

And you, Norman Rockwell,  
 You  
 Preserver of Memories  
 On covers  
 Of Satevepost,  
 Where are you,  
 Norman Rockwell?

Where are you  
 As I ride on diesel busses,  
 Wishing for a gas mask,  
 And slither on vinyl seat-covers,  
 My insecure bottom longing for  
 The waffled solidity of woven benches  
 On a streetcar named Lagonda—  
 Shrieking on its rails and sparking blue overhead,  
 With a clangorous ringing as it comes!  
 Or came—  
 For now it is gone.  
 They have taken it from us.  
 Not for roadside diners  
 (TRUCKERS WELCOME: GOOD EATS),  
 Not at rest—or even resting in some elephant’s graveyard—  
 But gone, totally gone!  
 O Toonerville Trolley, lost folly of technology’s  
 Adolescence!  
 And mine.  
 And thine,  
 Norman Rockwell,  
 Etcher of Past Glories on hardware store calendars,  
 Where are you,  
 Norman Rockwell?

Where are you,  
 As I munch my drearyburger,  
 Processed wafer-thin and sterile,  
 Untouched by human hands,  
 Out of an infra-red reactor,  
 Dulling the palate  
 With the gummy enrichment of Wonder-buns,  
 While I grow wistful  
 For Saturday picnics by the bandstand’s blare,  
 For potato salad potlucks put together with largesse  
 By maxi-skirted women unemancipated by The Pill,  
 And stodgy fathers playing one-a-cat in spats,  
 And dogs unpedigreed, all answering to “Spot,”  
 And God in His Heaven, bearded and benign!  
 But damnitall, Altizer, and blast you Bishop Robinson,  
 And all you marrying priests and potsmoking pastors:  
 You have killed off picnics as well as The Deity!  
 And left us what?  
 Coca-Cola in a can with a lift-off lid to litter by,  
 And not even Norman Rockwell to limit the way it is:  
 Drawing teenyboppers with hickeys,  
 And the matted hair so real you can smell it,  
 And The New Morality as old lechery rebottled,

And the dinning thump, unamplified and dissonant,  
And Master MacLuhan truly seen at last in his emperor's clothes,  
And sugar cubes in their rightful places  
In horses' mouths!

And then, perhaps, it would all go away.

Yes, I think it would,  
If only you were here,  
Norman Rockwell,  
Immortalizer of Americana  
In mail-order catalogues.

Where are you,  
Norman Rockwell,  
Now that we need you?

**Minister:**

Mercenary humanity—  
In its infantile pride,  
Has thought  
To have taken  
The measures of earth,  
And of nature.

Forgotten  
Are the outdoor memories  
Of childhood.

Discarded,  
The beatific visions  
Of youth.

Lost  
Are the sunny aspirations  
Of adulthood.

For  
In the desparate round  
Of getting and spending,  
We have grown apart  
From Mother Earth,  
From the sun, our Father,  
Our siblings the trees,  
And the whole blessed family  
Of plants and flowers,  
Beasts and birds.

We have lost our delight—  
That age-old delight—  
In the feel of the earth,  
In the things that grow.

**Reader:**

Seeing her there, huddled frail  
Against my house, displaying

Her wounds, cruel shearings-off  
 Of half her branches by icicles,  
 Monstrous things still posed  
 Above her, loosened by thaw,  
 I cannot resist playing God  
 And, with shovel, pick and rake,  
 I set to work at her feet,  
 She no longer looking young  
 But old old old, bent over  
 In that gnarly way, thatched white  
 With the burden of many, too many  
 Falls of snow, a weary andromeda  
 Bu careless nurserymen planted  
 Alongside darkling green spires  
 Of yew and spruce and arborvitae,  
 Obstructing sun and rain and air,  
 Jostling, crowding, asserting  
 Territorial rights above and below  
 And she, as I discover, finding  
 Little comfort in her miniscule  
 Plot of earth, her shallow-rooted  
 Substance misshapen by twistings,  
 By frantic, desperate cleavings  
 To crumbling remnants of used brick  
 And the concrete shards plowed under  
 By masons and builders, along with  
 Rusted nails, copper strips, glass  
 And odd lengths of wood-ply  
 Made resistant by chemicals  
 To the needful sweet decomposition  
 That might have succored her  
 So that her bole a dwarfed deformed  
 Almost placental look has about it  
 As I disengage it from that man-heap  
 Where no summer's warmth was ever stored,  
 No springtime waters held in spongy loam,  
 No fastnesses of hidden insect world  
 In aerating splendor thrived to feed  
 And be fed upon by such as she.  
 And so, gently, tenderly, awkward  
 In my husbandry, I place her down,  
 Far down in the forefront where  
 Thousand-year topsoil accumulations  
 Each inch-deep, await her hungerings,  
 Into a bath I have prepared for her,  
 A steamy seminal soup of manure and peat,  
 Mounding up the rich black dirt about her  
 In a sheltering basin that is awash  
 With substance of every sort, and she sighs,  
 Her few remaining leaves rustling breathlessly  
 At the feel of an unimpeded breeze,  
 The snowcaps on her head melting  
 In the path of the sun's forgotten round.  
 And only then, when I have finished  
 And stand back to survey my handiwork  
 Do I discover the flowers—

Long, pendant, delicate white bloomings  
She had earlier put out  
Somehow nurtured and brought fourth  
Long before my accidental rescuing,  
Despite her painings and her small  
Starveling womb—frail, young-old  
Madonna-andromeda, reacting doggedly,  
Bravely, deliciously to some early touch  
Of spring. And so, seeing her then,  
Truly seeing her at last, I too,  
Barren as I had been of pride,  
Of all accomplishment, lost,  
Lonely and orphaned as I had felt  
In this time of wintry discard,  
No choice had I except to rake aside  
My lifetime's long-accumulated leavings,  
Set shovel to the mounded, wasted days,  
Days of a dying year, to cling no more  
To shabby, bare existence but now  
Myself address to newer bloomings  
And then upon my own now-summoned  
Springtime feed, done at last, done  
With God-playing and man suffering,  
Revived again, renewed, made whole  
By a frail and mute andromeda.

**Minister:**

It is not too late  
To make amends  
With the earth we live on,  
With one another.

As we sit here,  
Surrounded  
By this sea of trees  
That enfold us  
Let us cherish again  
The memories we have lost.

Restore anew  
The visions discarded.

Recover once more  
The aspirations forgot.

From a wiser Nature  
Let us learn  
To change without destroying,  
To grow without overpowering,  
To be without demanding.

Let us grow wise  
Under waterfalls,  
Learn of living  
And of dying  
From the trees as they are felled,

From the vines as they wither on the wall.

Let the birds in their twitterings  
Teach us the glory of a dew-sweet morn.

Let children instruct us—

Let lovers inspire us—

Let all humankind,  
In its misery and its ecstasy,  
Teach us hunger.

Oh, let us hunger!

Let us hunger  
For more than we can get—

Give more of ourselves than is—

And, in loving, become love itself!

Let us,  
In this gentle, mothering season,  
Try to discover—  
As Thoreau did—  
All that life on this earth  
Has to teach us.

So that we may not,  
When we come to depart.  
Discover  
That we have not lived,  
Have not enjoyed to the fullest  
What is everywhere about us  
And within us:

These simple gifts!

**Hymn:** "'Tis a Gift to Be Simple"  
#16 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

**Minister:**  
The service is concluded.  
Another summer's day awaits you.

**Recessional**

### Community Sing

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do!  
I'm half crazy, all for the love of you.  
It won't be a stylish marriage,  
I can't afford a carriage,  
But you'll look sweet

I've been workin' on the railroad  
All the livelong day.  
I've been workin' on the railroad  
Just to pass the time away.  
Don't you hear the whistle blowin'?

Upon the seat of a bicycle built for two.

Rise up so early in the morn?  
Don't you hear the captain shoutin'  
"Dinah blow your horn."

Beautiful Dreamer, wake unto me,  
Starlight and dewdrops are waiting for thee.  
Sounds of the rude world, heard in the day,  
Lulled by the moonlight have all passed away.  
Beautiful Dreamer, Queen of my song—  
List while I woo thee with soft melody.  
Gone are the cares of this life's busy throng  
Beautiful Dreamer, awake unto me—  
Beautiful Dreamer, awake unto me.

Just a song at twilight,  
When the lights are low—  
And the flick'ring shadows  
Softly come and go.  
Tho' the heart be weary,  
Sad the day and long:  
Still to us at twilight  
Comes love's old song.  
Comes love's old sweet song.

Casey would waltz with the strawberry blonde  
And the band played on—  
He'd glide cross the floor with the girl he adored  
And the band played on—  
But his brain was so loaded it nearly exploded,  
The poor girl would shake with alarm,  
He'd ne'er leave the girl with the strawberry curls,  
And the band played on.

Good night, ladies, good night, ladies, good night ladies,  
We're going to leave you now.  
Merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along,  
Merrily we roll along, o'er the deep blue sea.

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2006

Homecoming

*A Service for the Reconsecration of the House*

by

John Vlahos

### The Reconsecration of the House

*The congregation assembles out of doors in front of the church. Each of the objects is handed out in turn to the persons carrying them. All wait outside until the trumpet processional.*

#### **Doxology**

#### **Minister:**

We are gathered here  
On this day of days  
To celebrate,  
To consecrate,  
To dedicate and sanctify  
In the name of aspiring humanity  
This house of worship,  
This ship of hope  
That shall transport us  
And all that follow  
Toward the ultimate promise  
Of earthly existence.

Here we shall,  
In devotion and humility,  
In reverence and faith,  
Put this great structure that is ours alone  
To its many uses—  
Temporal and spiritual—  
With a readiness of being  
To serve and teach one another,  
To sing our praises  
Of the good and the beautiful,  
To ritualize all those occasions  
Of great and small moment  
In our lives.

It is fitting  
That we should conceive  
And think of this place  
As a magnificent vessel,  
Waiting to bear us  
Into the great adventures  
Lying beyond our present horizons.  
Arklike,  
It sits in simple majesty  
Ready to receive us all—  
Men, women, and children.

It is even more fitting  
That those who have traveled the furthest  
In order to make this great journey  
Should be the first to enter,  
To step forward and lead us into this church

*Membership rolls are given to charter or long-time members.*

Next,  
I would give to our church officers—

So chosen by us all  
Through the processes of democracy  
To administer our affairs—  
To them I would give the articles  
Empowering them to act  
In our common weal  
For our property and well-being:  
The bylaws of this church.

*The bylaws are given to church officers*

To these representatives of our young  
I would pass certain volumes:  
The sacred books of countless others  
Who have, in their time,  
Stood before other edifices of worship  
In like expectation,  
Uttering words not unlike these,  
Filled with the selfsame wishes and prayers  
That move us.

To them I entrust:  
The Koran of Islam,  
The Analects of Confucius,  
The Hindu Vedas,  
The Pentateuch of Israel,  
The book of the Hopi,  
The New Testament of Christianity,  
The Bhagavad-Gita—  
All the records of human aspirations  
Toward the best,  
The noblest,  
The eternal within them.

To these I would add,  
As symbols of our own searching,  
This handful of books  
That question where others bow down,  
Wonder where others accept,  
Move onward while others remain behind.

*Philosophies are given to young people*

To the smallest of our children  
We would give over  
Certain tokens of our daily lives  
To be borne into our church home:  
A bit of earth,  
A touch of sea water,  
A handful of late summer blooms.

*Flowers, earth, and sea water are given to children*

For these are our relics  
These, we would enshrine  
In this house of glass and wood,  
Beam and buttress,

Stone and slab.

Carry them all, gently,  
With that reverence for the universal  
That marks the truly liberal, truly questioning mind.

Let the rest of us  
Follow these token-bearers  
As best befits us:  
As single men and women,  
Husbands and wives,  
Friends and families—  
Each carrying within  
That which is most precious to us all.  
Lifting up our heads and minds,  
Opening up our hearts  
As we walk towards the wide-flung doors  
Of this, our church, and home.

**Processional** “Trumpet Voluntary”

*Those bearing the various objects enter the church first, standing at the rear of the church behind the seats. The congregation follows them in and sits. Then the bearers carry the objects to the front of the church, placing them on the table. The minister remains at the back of the church.*

**Offering**

**President of the Congregation:**

Let us join together in singing hymn number \_\_\_\_.

**Hymn:** “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”

#281 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

#51 in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*

*Board members remain standing at the end of the hymn*

**President:**

Congregated here now,  
Having taken our rightful places  
It is meet that we should look anew  
Into our hearts and minds—  
That we might dedicate ourselves afresh  
To the aims and meanings of this fellowship.

**Male Board Member:**

For this alone is our destiny.  
Having built this church  
We must inhabit it, yearly  
With that compelling vision  
That has evermore been our heritage,  
With those mysteries of life  
That transcend time and space,  
With a sense of the wholeness of life,  
With convictions of enduring value,  
And, lastly,  
With brotherhood and sisterhood.

**Female Board Member:**

Therefore,  
Let us now praise,  
Let us bless, adore, and glorify this shell  
Let us love this place in all its barren beauty.  
Let us make of it a house of cool repose,  
Of light and peace.

**President:**

For this building  
Is more than home,  
More than haven.  
This building is our fulfillment,  
The expression of our accumulated need  
Repeated in line and form,  
Color and texture,  
Shadow and substance.  
It is the embodiment  
Of all our yearnings—  
The symbol of our love  
For one another!

**Male Board Member:**

And we have within it now,  
In this moment,  
All we need of earthly riches.

**Female Board Member:**

No need have we  
Of graven images  
Or fearful talismans.  
No need for empty pomp  
Or gilded vestments.

**Male Board Member:**

For by our every action  
We shall adorn it.

**Female Board Member:**

By our every thought  
We shall sanctify it.

**President:**

In service, shall we give it substance!

**Choral Response:** "All Are Architects of Fate"

*Speakers from the congregation rise to speak*

**Male Speaker:**

Day after day,  
We hasten to our work,  
Leaving home and hearth  
Behind us,  
Carrying with us  
Memories of quick embraces  
In ritual partings;

Small rememberings  
Of outside greenery  
And interior warmth.

**Female Speaker:**

Day after day,  
We hasten to our work,  
Abroad or at home  
Tending small children,  
Or elsewhere, wondering  
Ever how they  
Are being tended,  
Wondering how to address  
The needs of work  
And family.

**Youth Speaker:**

Day after day,  
We shuttle between  
The twin worlds of our discontent,  
In the isolated limbo  
Of learning and of growing,  
With no middle ground to stand on  
As we are confronted by  
The towering heights  
Of our expectations.

**Male Speaker:**

What shall we make of this place  
On this day and in the days to come?

**President:**

Please join me in the congregational response.

**Congregational Response**

Let us make of it  
A refuge,  
But not an escape—  
A place wherein to stand  
That we may move our world  
And shape its course.

Let us make of it  
A seeking-place,  
Knowing  
That in the questions alone  
Can answers be found.

Let us make of it  
An opening-of-doors place,  
That we may not shut ourselves up  
Within our human finitude,  
Male or female,  
Living unto ourselves alone,  
For there is no peace of mind

In such isolation.

Lastly,  
Let us make of it  
A listening-place.  
Let us listen  
In the stillness of our beings  
To the deepest regions of our hearts—  
Listening for that which can be heard  
If one has the courage of silence  
And the strength to hear.

**Choral Response:** “Thou All Indwelling Mystery”

*Speakers from the congregation and Board members (except for the President) all sit.*

**President:**

Men, women, and children,  
We make up this congregation.  
But we cannot, as adults,  
Charge the young  
Or those about to join us  
As adults themselves  
With precepts they must find  
In individual quests.

But we welcome them  
To use this house of worship  
In what ways they will  
In their classic search  
For meaning and identity,  
Giving them all that we can  
Through those who lead them.

**Church School Speaker:**

Men and women as we are—  
Human and fallible—  
No more than you are we,  
And we can, as teachers,  
But mark off  
Certain guideposts along the way  
And lend support  
When they would have it—  
Reminding them,  
Out of our own experience,  
That to falter and reach out  
For a helping hand  
Is merely a falling-back  
On the nearest stepping-stone  
Of humanity’s slow, tortured progress  
Through the ages.

**President:**

We ask now that the representatives of our young people come forward to deliver the readings for this day.

**First Reader:**

This was written by John Dunne, in 1630:

“All mankind is one volume. When one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language. And every chapter must be so translated. Some by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice. And in the end, all our scattered leaves shall be bound up for that library where every book shall lie open to one another.

**Second Reader:**

This was written by Miguel Unamuno, in 1935:

“I shall be asked: What is your religion? And I shall answer that my religion is to seek truth in life and life in truth, conscious that I shall not find them while I live. My religion is to struggle with the unknown. My religion is to struggle with God as they say Jacob did, from earliest dawn until nightfall. I shall not admit the unknowable and the unrecognizable nor any ‘beyond this thou shalt not pass!’ I reject any eternal ‘we must remain ignorant!’ In short, I wish—I shall strive to reach the inaccessible!”

**Anthem**

*Board members rise*

**President:**

And yet, we are not whole.

**Female Board Member:**

Alone, we stand  
Here on the shores  
Of that which is to all known—

**Male Board Member:**

Ready to set sail with the rising sea-tides  
Of our collective minds and hearts—

**Female Board Member:**

Desiring to fathom the unknowable—

**Male Board Member:**

To take measure of the immeasurable!

**President:**

For  
We are like a great ship,  
Landlocked and earthbound—  
Ever in need of a captain  
Keeping watch on the North Star  
Overhead,  
Setting us on our course  
In this common journey—

**Female Board Member:**

This hand-held search—

**Male Board Member:**

This sharing and this striving,

Compacted by this small human family—

**Female Board Member:**

Family of many families!

**President:**

All joined together  
In a mutual longing for meaning  
In this life—

**Female Board Member:**

Needing only a captain  
To set and deep us on our course.

**Male Board Member:**

Else, rudderless, we drift—

**Female Board Member:**

An echoing wilderness voice are we  
Without the ministering hand—

**Male Board Member:**

The guiding, sure response—

**President:**

The distant-vision seeking  
Of (him/her) we summon now

*The minister comes forward*

In this seeking  
We have summoned you, \_\_\_\_\_ .

Summoned you  
To submit into your hands  
The most precious of our dreams.

Take it now—

**Female Board Member:**

Cherish it—

**Male Board Member:**

Hold it fast—

**President:**

Feed and nurture it—

**Female Board Member:**

Give it scope and dimension,  
Power and vitality—

**Male Board Member:**

With thrust and tension,  
Make it to soar—

**President:**

High make it soar—  
Higher still  
Than we have dreamed—

**Female Board Member:**

Farther aloft  
Than our collected vision  
Has ever taken us—

**Male Board Member:**

Toward all the distant wonders  
Of our communal comprehension!

**President:**

Succor us also  
In our time of need—

**Female Board Member:**

Uplift our hearts  
When they would falter—

**Male Board Member:**

Illumine our joys  
And give substance  
To our pleasures,  
That they may all transcend  
The transiency of each moment—

**President:**

Instruct us as well,  
For there is no end to learning,  
And there is none among us  
Who is not beset by the unanswered.

*Board members sit. Speakers from the congregation rise, one by one, and remain standing*

**Male Speaker:**

We are but humans  
An aeon or two removed  
From the primeval mire  
Of this fair earth's evolving,  
And only lately  
Have we cast off  
The mindlessness of our beginnings.

Shall we be led by reason, then, unto the Absolute?

**Minister's Response:** *To be written by the minister*

**Female Speaker:**

The gods of early people were fearful:  
Beasts of the wind and cave—  
Thunder, and flashings of heaven.  
Cowering humans crouched by lonely fires,  
Exorcising their gods with ochre daubs  
On vaulting cavern walls.

Shall we spatter our specters on picture windows?

**Minister's Response:** *To be written by the minister*

**Male Speaker:**

The Jews of Israel stood in awe—  
Their father vindictive,  
Quick to anger,  
Stern in justice,  
Watchful as a parent.

On whose eternal knee shall we climb for guidance?

**Minister's Response:** *To be written by the minister*

**Female Speaker:**

Christ on the cross,  
Redemption brings to all believers.  
Blood and body pass to waiting mouths  
Of genuflecting supplicants  
Who walk away,  
Absolved and cleansed.

Whom shall we be suffered to come unto, in our childlike agonies?

**Minister's Response:** *To be written by the minister*

**Male Speaker:**

Monstrous ids and suffocating egos  
Blind us with passions.  
The new witch-doctors tell us  
We are captive  
In the deep integument of flesh,  
Lost,  
In the tortured labyrinths of self.

What universal couch-confessional shall give us our release?

**Minister's Response:** *To be written by the minister*

**Youth Speaker:**

False prophets,  
Prophets of doom and indulgence  
Beset us on all sides,  
Urging us  
To consume and to destroy,  
To find salvation in alienation  
When we seek only to create,  
To find oneness in each other.

What voice shall lead us  
Out of the synthetic wilderness of our times?

**Minister's Response:** *To be written by the minister*

*Speakers from the congregation sit. President rises*

**President:**

Free men and women in a free church  
We lay no charge upon you  
As you ascend  
This pulpit's tree-like heights  
To undertake your chosen portion  
Of this precious dialogue.  
We ask only this—

Will the congregation repeat with me as indicated.

**Congregational Response:**

That, with love, you will lead us toward love,  
With insight, toward understanding,  
With humbleness toward humility,  
With caring, toward commitment,  
With joy, toward fulfillment.

**President:**

This we ask  
As we call upon this child  
To take your hand  
And sweetly lead you  
To your place.

*A small child comes forward, leading the minister to the pulpit*

**Minister's Response:** *To be written by the minister ending with:*

In that prospect, let us rejoice  
And be joined now in quiet meditation.

**Unison Meditation:**

Hear us when we speak,  
For we are not ciphered groundlings  
In our timeless yearnings  
And our ageless dreamings.

Standing in this company of friends—  
Unfettered by creed, untouched by dogma—  
We are the glorious sum of every man,  
Reaching out in growing numbers  
Toward the blessed infinity of love  
And the steadfast comfort  
Of unanswerable eternity.  
Amen.

**Choral Response**

**Minister:**

United in love and fellowship,  
We reverence the memory  
Of those who have passed  
From our midst.

They are with us on this day—

In every fluttering of a leaf beyond,  
In the motes and beams  
Of each ray of sunlight warming us,  
In all that they loved and knew  
Of this good green earth.

As they are always in our thoughts,  
Let us, in this solemn moment,  
Memorialize their presence  
By this roll call.

Let each who knew and loved them—  
Whether friend or kin—  
Resonantly call out their names  
Unto the uppermost reaches  
Of this, our common sanctuary!

*Congregational Roll Call of the names of members (printed in the Order of Service) who have died during the past year*

**Minister:**

In gentle celebration now let us join together singing.

**Hymn:** “May Nothing Evil Cross This Door”

#1 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

# 159 in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*

**Minister’s Benediction:**

Standing before this green altar, Earth,  
Awash on all sides by this sea of trees—  
The North Star forever beckoning overhead—  
Let us, hand in hand,  
In love’s name venture forth  
From this fair, hallowed spot,  
Joined  
In the sweet brother and sisterhood  
Of this human family,  
Now and forevermore,  
Amen.

**Choral Amen**

**Recessional:** “Trumpet Voluntary”

A Service for Thanksgiving

*Adapted in part from:*

*Stephan Vincent Benet's Western Star*

by

John Vlahos

### A Service for Thanksgiving

*The chancel is set as a farmyard in the fall. Dried cornstalks can be tied to the pulpit to resemble a shock of fodder. An axe can be imbedded in the end of a log beside a stack of split firewood. A bale of hay, a small stone fence and an antique wooden wheelbarrow would be nice touches. Dried leaves can be scattered on the floor. Use your imagination.*

*There are two pairs of readers; one pair is the "Minister" and a "Reader" (who should be the opposite gender from the minister). The other pair is a "Man" and a "Woman." There are also three readers (two men and one woman) reading the "Proclamations" of Governor Bradford and President Washington and the letter of Pricilla Alden.*

#### THE SUMMONS

**Minister:**

The darkling season of the year  
Comes now upon us.  
For November is the twilight month,  
The very dusk-time of nature.

**Reader:**

Earth pulls her russet blanket  
Fast about her.  
The winter stars come forth  
To deck the limbs of trees gone bare.

**Minister:**

These are the wistful days and nights.

**Woman:**

Nights of orange moons and frosty silence.

**Man:**

Dew-cold mornings in stubbled fields.

**Woman:**

Birds in flights across barren woods.

**Man:**

Leaves, gone to mold.

**Woman:**

The soft forest loam giving way,  
Underfoot.

**Man:**

Stone walls emerging,  
Proud in their ordered symmetry.

**Minister:**

For Man it is the time of the hearth.  
It is the season when each of us kneels  
To perform the sacrament of the fire  
Within his house.

**Reader:**

The ceremonial of the first fire

Fills our houses with the wood incense of earth.  
Summer's warmth is recaptured and remembered  
As we pile the hearth with seasoned oak,  
With deadwood, ensalted by the sea.

**Minister:**

Touching the heaping boughs to flame,  
We gather about to be warmed  
And in so doing,  
We consecrate our homes  
And our selves.

**Woman:**

Summer is ended!

**Man:**

Harvest is come!

**Reader:**

The world goes forward,  
And we move with it,  
Holding on to that which we have known.  
And those before us have known.

**Minister:**

“And it came to pass, in the eleventh month of the fortieth year, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel according unto all that the Lord had given him in commandment unto them, saying:

Thou shalt keep the feast of the tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in from thy threshing floor and from thy wine press; and thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou and thy son, and thy daughter, and the stranger and the fatherless, and the widow that are within thy gates. And thou shalt be altogether joyful.

And they went out into the field and gathered their vineyards and trod the grapes and held festival. And there was very great gladness.”

**Reader:**

In the names of Ceres and Demeter,  
Astarte and Semele,  
Tammuz and Dionysius  
Were festivals also kept.

**Man:**

Four days and four nights,  
The Indians of the new world  
Performed their annual rites of purification.

**Woman:**

Whole villages were cleansed and renewed.

**Man:**

Old clothes and provisions were discarded.

**Woman:**

New fires were kindled.

**Man:**

White men came,  
And in the first year,  
They sat together—

**Woman:**

Feasted together—

**Man:**

Gave thanks together.

**Woman:**

For festivals are the time of the heart!

**Minister:**

These are the moments  
When the heart sings and dances,  
When love is given and received,  
When changing earth lifts us  
From the pattern of our lives,  
Feeding the many hungers of the spirit.

Therefore,  
Let us keep festival here this day:  
Husbands and wives,  
Sons and daughters,  
Fathers and mothers,  
Brothers and sisters,  
Friends and fellow-men.

Gathered together  
Under one roof in this church,  
Let us now give praise and thanks.

**Hymn:** "For the Beauty of the Earth"

#21 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

# 12 in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*

**Male Reader:**

Proclamation. To all ye Pilgrims:

Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, beans, squashes and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as He has protected us from the ravages of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience; now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday, November ye 29<sup>th</sup> of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty-three, and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all like blessings.

(Signed) William Bradford  
Ye Governor of ye Colony

**Female Reader:**

From a letter by Pricilla Alden, dated December 11, 1623:

“We set the last spring some twenty acres of Indian corn and sowed some six acres of barley and peas, and, according to the manner of the Indians, we manured our ground with herrings, or rather shads, which we have in great abundance and take with ease at our doors. Our corn did prove well; and, God be praised, we had a good increase of Indian corn. Then our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might, after a special manner, rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors.

They four in one day killed as many fowl as, with a little help beside, served the company almost a week, at which time, amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest king, Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted; and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought and bestowed on our governor.

And although it is not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want, that we wish you all partakers of our plenty.”

**Male Reader:**

“Proclamation.

I, George Washington, President of the United States, do recommend to all religious societies and denominations, and to all persons whomsoever within the United States, to set apart and observe Thursday, the 19<sup>th</sup> day, as a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, and on that day to meet together and render sincere and hearty thanks for the manifold and signal mercies which distinguish our lot as a nation. Particularly for the possession of constitutions of government which unite and, by their union, establish liberty with order. For the preservation of our peace, foreign and domestic. For the prosperous condition of our affairs, public and private, and at the same time humbly and fervently beseech the kind Author of these blessings graciously to prolong them to us. To imprint on our hearts a deep and solemn sense of our immense value. To preserve us from the arrogance of prosperity and from hazarding the advantages we enjoy by delusive pursuits. To dispose us to merit the continuance of these favors by not abusing them. And by a corresponding conduct as citizens and as men to render this country more and more a safe and propitious asylum for the unfortunate of other countries. To extend among us true and useful knowledge. To diffuse and establish habits of sobriety, order and piety. And finally to impart all the blessings we possess or ask for ourselves to the whole family of mankind.

In testimony whereof, I have caused the seal of the United States of America to be affixed to these presents, and signed the same with my hand. Done at the city of Philadelphia, the first day of November, 1795.”

**THE LITANY**

**Minister:**

Thanksgiving crowns each passing year.

In the midst of praise,  
We must needs look back  
To count our blessings  
And reckon the sum of our tribulations.

The joys of gathering together  
Are mixed forever with sorrow  
For those absent from our midst

Taken hence  
From family circle,  
Church home,  
And grieving nation.

For them,  
As for ourselves,  
We join to say this litany.

A litany for all people!

**Reader:**

For those who dream at night  
Of the blessings of affluence,  
Having gone to bed  
Ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed,  
Sick in body and in spirit.

**Minister:**

And for those who would  
Deny them those blessings!

**Reader:**

A litany for all people  
Caught in the emptiness of strife,  
Both civil and international,  
For the quick and the dead among them,  
And for those who unwillingly  
Are about to die.

**Minister:**

A litany of all our failures:

**Reader:**

In partisan politics and universal cynicism.

**Minister:**

In the senseless chasm between young and old.

**Reader:**

In the wavering ethics of the business community.

**Minister:**

In the fleeting transience of family life.

**Reader:**

In the careless spoiling of this good green earth.

**Minister:**

A litany of all our longings:  
Hemmed in by suspicion  
Of the inquiring mind,  
And the deeper distrust  
Of the questioning spirit!

**Reader:**

A litany of yearnings  
For the solemn vows once made and loosely kept.

**Man:**

Vows made  
In childhood's khaki splendor  
Listening with tenderfooted awe  
To the ringing roll call of manly virtues.

**Woman:**

Vows made  
In the straw-clutching rebellion of adolescence,  
With its agonies of awkward independence.

**Man:**

Vows made  
During the disillusion and groping,  
The reaching and striving of manhood.

**Woman:**

In the glowing moments of the nuptial rites,  
Standing alongside another,  
Ring-bound and rice-swept.

**Man:**

On hearing the cry of our firstborn,  
Lying swaddled before us  
In antiseptic glory.

**Minister:**

A litany for all of us—  
O words that call forth our gravest outcries!

**Reader:**

For we are like the sheaves in the fields,  
Abundantly watered by the tears of Humanity.

**Woman:**

We are the fruit of some eternal sowing,  
Rooted to one another in this fallow earth,  
This warm seedbed of Humankind.

**Man:**

Waiting!  
  
Waiting  
To be gathered in together  
In this time of sleep and renewal.  
Knowing not  
With what increase we have ripened,  
Nor in what measure the coming winter  
Will test our hardihood,  
Measure our good humor,  
Try out our courage and maturity.

**Minister:**

But  
We are sustained,  
Knowing that one thing passes  
Only to make way for another.

As leaf-mold feeds  
The first green buds of May,  
So do we, in passing, nourish  
The common roots of our kind.

Therefore, let us live each season  
As it comes.  
Taking the best of it  
And enduring the worst.

**Reader:**

Spending the golden days  
Joyously!

**Man:**

Mourning not—

**Woman:**

Weeping not.

**Minister:**

Let us, instead,  
To each we touch  
In these autumnal days,  
Be of some service,  
However small.

**Reader:**

Let us speak gently to all.

**Woman:**

Let us make our household glad!

**Man:**

Let us reach out to the lonely,  
Call the stranger Brother!  
Be not blinded by present evil.

**Minister:**

Let us  
Look to the good,  
Go to the good,  
Rejoice in the good.

For the good is all,  
And must prevail!

**Hymn of Francis of Assisi**

#203 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

#23 in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*

**CLOSING WORDS**

**Minister:**

Warmed by memories  
Of summers past,  
Given sustenance  
In the sweet expectation  
Of springs to come—

Give thanks again.

Take heart in Fellowship.

Together now  
Let us seek  
The purifying snows ahead.

**POSTLUDE**

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**2006**

A Christmas Vigil  
*A Service for Christmas Eve*

by

John Vlahos

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2006

## A Christmas Vigil

*Please see cast list, prop list, and production notes at the end of the service.*

*As they enter the sanctuary each person is given a candle.*

**Congregational Carol:** “O Come All Ye Faithful”

*The Speaking Chorus processes in following their director and takes its place during the singing of the carol.*

*House lights dim.*

**Chorus:**

On this night of nights—  
Revolving about its sun—  
This planet earth  
Marks yet another journey  
Toward infinity.

**Girl Solus:**

Another year casts off  
Its solar darkness—

**Boy Solus:**

The winter solstice ends.

**Chorus:**

Together  
We have gathered here  
To sit in solemn company—

**Boy Solus:**

People of our time  
With people of all time.

**Girl Solus:**

We have lighted candles  
In the winter night.

**Girl Solus:**

Candles burn  
In our windows—  
Beckoning—

**Boy Solus:**

That all who wish  
May find their way  
Into this consecrated place

**Chorus:**

With open doors and open hearts  
We welcome you into this house  
Who would in vigil, hand in hand,  
With us in this ageless star watch stand.

*House lights up.*

**Congregational Carol:** "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"

*House lights down.*

**Boy Chorus:**

Now bring into this house  
The Christmas greens.

**Girl Chorus:**

Bring laurel and holly,  
Pine branch and fir,  
Rosemary and ivy.

**Chorus:**

To each pass out  
The golden boughs of mistletoe.

**Girl Solus:**

With wilderness incense fill the air.

**Boy Solus:**

Put pine green and red berry  
Into the white teeth of winter!

*Ushers distribute sprigs of holly and mistletoe. Parents should be cautioned that holly and mistletoe are toxic and should prevent children from eating them. An alternative is hang the sprigs on a wire rather than distributing them to the congregation.*

**Congregational Carol:** "Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly"

*House lights down.*

**Girl Chorus:**

Beneath the holly, then,  
Let all your quarrels end.

**Boy Chorus:**

Below the ancient mistletoe  
Your everlasting friendship pledge.

**Junior Choir:** "Shepherd Shake Off Your Drowsy Slumber"

**Girl Chorus:**

They say that Christmas lives  
In every child—

**Chorus:**

Not for a day  
But always.

**Boy Solus:**

Suffer then  
The children  
The little children  
To come unto us.

**Chorus:**

That we may know the secret of Christmas  
And put wisdom into our hearts,  
That we may be taught once more  
The sweet immortality of childhood.

**Junior Choir:** “The Twelve Days of Christmas”

*Enter a boy and a girl who pantomime the song. (See production notes.)*

**Chorus:**

But songs alone—  
Though they may fill  
Our hearts with gladness—

**Girl Solus:**

Songs alone  
Are not enough.

**Girl Chorus:**

Christmas is more  
Than family feasting

**Boy Chorus:**

More than holiday giving—

**Chorus:**

Christmas is  
And was  
And ever shall be—

**Congregational Carol:** “Silent Night”

*Enter a mother with a baby. They sit in the chancel.*

**Chorus:**

There was  
In the days of Herod  
A child—

**Girl Solus:**

Lying in a manger.

**Boy Chorus:**

And as it came to pass,  
The child became a man—

**Chorus:**

And the man became a miracle.

*House lights up.*

**Congregational Carol:** “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

*House lights down.*

**Boy Solus:**  
Jesus lives—

**Girl Solus:**  
In every child.

**Boy Solus:**  
And every man and woman.

**Chorus:**  
Teacher of all,  
A child in our midst—

**Boy Solus:**  
He lives.

**Chorus:**  
For every child is the Christ Child,  
And every child-song is the song of angels.

**Junior Choir:** “What Child is This?”

**Chorus:**  
Little child, little child:

**Girl Solus:**  
Born to one of us who gather here tonight—

**Chorus:**  
Sent to us, in this winter solstice,

**Boy Chorus:**  
To be one of our company—

**Chorus:**  
Now and forevermore  
In all the days of our joining  
And our cleaving.

Child of our church,  
We bring you  
On this winter’s night  
These gifts:

**Boy Solus:**  
The gift of brotherhood:

*A child approaches the baby and pantomimes giving a gift.*

**Chorus:**  
That none may count you different  
Nor be counted thus by you.

**Girl Solus:**  
The gift of friendship:

*A child approaches the baby and pantomimes giving a gift.*

**Chorus:**  
That greets no one as stranger in any land.

**Boy Solus:**  
The gift of charity:

*A child approaches the baby and pantomimes giving a gift.*

**Chorus:**  
That you may have patience and forbearance  
For those who cannot walk your way.

**Girl Solus:**  
The gift of tongues:

*A child approaches the baby and pantomimes giving a gift.*

**Chorus:**  
That you may gently instruct the immoderate  
In speech and the troubles in their anger.

**Boy Solus:**  
The gift of citizenship!

*A child approaches the baby and pantomimes giving a gift.*

**Chorus:**  
To church and community, nation and commonwealth  
Of nations—universe and infinity.

**Girl Solus”**  
The gift of understanding:

*A child approaches the baby and pantomimes giving a gift.*

**Chorus:**  
That you may live in harmony with all.

**Boy Solus:**  
The gift of love:

*A child approaches the baby and pantomimes giving a gift.*

**Chorus:**  
That binds us every one, from generation  
To generation, time without end.

*House Lights up.*

**Congregational Carol:** “We Three Kings”

*Mother and baby return to their seats in the congregation.*

*House Lights down.*

**Boy Solus:**

A child is like a tree,  
Ever green.

**Girl Solus:**

A child grows  
With heart aspiring,  
Upward.

**Chorus:**

Turning toward the light,  
Singing a spring song,  
Always.

**Girl Solus:**

Now let us celebrate  
This tree of life.

**Chorus:**

In this Christmas time,  
In the closing circle of this year—

**Boy Solus:**

In wonder let us worship—

**Boy Solus:**

With joy let us sing.

**Chorus:**

Hand in hand,  
The children round,  
Dance the ring-dance  
Of the ages.

**Junior Choir:** “O Tannenbaum”

*Junior youth group children join hands and move in a circle.*

**Chorus:**

See how this tree points upward  
To the farthest star.

**Girl Solus:**

We are  
For all we know,  
A light on some galactic tree  
Deep in the infinity of space,  
Beyond our little star.

**Boy Solus:**

And children there  
May point up to us  
And say—

**Chorus:**

“Oh, look how brightly shines  
That twinkling star  
On this cold winter night”

**Congregational Carol:** “Star of Wonder” and chorus from “We Three Kings”

**Boy Solus:**

Now fully sits the darkness  
On the waning day.

**Girl Chorus:**

The sun moves on its wintry course.

**Boy Chorus:**

And we must now make swift,  
As all folk have,  
To light the last long night.

**Boy Solus:**

Australopithecus Prometheus, (*Enter candle bearer*)  
Stone age brother,  
Early man,  
Bring forth your new-found flame,  
For we have need of it.

**Girl Solus:**

Ancient Zarathustra, (*Enter candle bearer*)  
Teacher of the Magi,  
Symbol of grace,  
Let shine your flaming nimbus upon us.

**Boy Solus:**

Brother Hindu, (*Enter candle bearer*)  
From Varuna, god of fire and light,  
Beg for our use  
A touch of brightness  
That we, too, may have a cluster of lights about us.

**Girl Solus:**

Noble Roman, (*Enter candle bearer*)  
Light a laurel lamp for us.

**Boy Solus:**

Egyptian brother, (*Enter candle bearer*)  
We seek the warming fires  
Of Aton.

**Girl Solus:**

Judah Maccabeus, (*Enter candle bearer*)  
Lend us your ritual lights  
That this place of worship  
May also have its yearly rite  
Of renewal and purification.

**Boy Solus:**

Sweet child Jesus, (*Enter candle bearer*)  
Loving Christmas  
Another child  
Awaits your light.

**Chorus:**

Humbly,  
We invoke you all,  
Light up this night.

**Chorus:**

Now  
From these timeless fires,  
Let each and every light  
Be lighted,  
One from another,  
And with it,  
Thus,  
Let us pass this touch of peace.

*Candle bearers pass the flame to members of the congregation seated at the end of each row.*

**Boy Solus:**

Child to man  
And man to woman.

**Boy Solus:**

From the eldest to youngest,

**Girl Solus:**

From mother to son  
And father to daughter,

**Boy Solus:**

And friend to friend.

**Chorus:**

Let each pass on  
This light of love.  
In common light  
Illuminate this hall!

**Junior Choir:** "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

**Chorus:**

God rest ye merry,  
One and all,  
  
Rejoice  
For the dark days are past!  
  
There is light on the leaf,  
And the shadows fall away beneath it.  
  
Grieve no more in winter darkness.

**Girl Solus:**

You are a light of the world,  
A tree ever green,  
Ablaze with the fires of centuries.

**Boy Solus:**

Pierce star fires—

**Girl Solus:**

Gentle child fires—

**Boy Solus:**

Inner fires  
Of our eternal yearnings.

**Chorus:**

All are one on Christmas Eve.

**Girl Solus:**

For you have become as little children here.

**Chorus:**

As little children then  
Walk forth!

**Boy Solus:**

Walk forth  
In Christmas' glorious light—

*House lights up.*

**Chorus:**

Singing  
One and all  
Of peace on earth,  
Good will toward all.  
Joy to the world.

**Congregational Carol:** "Joy to the World"

*Speaking chorus exits followed by gift bearers, candle bearers, and junior choir, all singing.*

**Cast for A Christmas Vigil**

Speaking Chorus: 8-12 senior high school students—half girls, half boys.

Junior Choir

Junior Youth Carolers

Twelve Days of Christmas: a boy and a girl grades 4-6

Ushers to pass holly and mistletoe

Gift Bearers: 7 children from early grades

Candle Bearers: 7 children from 6<sup>th</sup> grade up

Mother and infant

Helpers: 2 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> graders to take care of gift bearers

Other Helpers:

Candle bearers' monitor

Production Assistants to manage lights and handling of holly and mistletoe

Sound amplification manager

### **Props for A Christmas Vigil**

Speaking Chorus: Members should be robed or similarly dressed. They need flashlights and script covers.

Twelve Days of Christmas Pair: a set of felt cutouts depicting the "gifts" described in the song; a set of five gilt curtain rings; a partridge in a pear tree

Candle Bearers: A set of seven reversible ponchos; a set of rope ties; a set of silk ties

A Christmas tree with a blinking light at the top

Boxes of mistletoe and holly

Small candles for the congregation

Tinsel

### Production Notes

The Speaking Chorus, preceded by its leader, processes to its place as the carol, "O Come All Ye Faithful," is sung. The leader directs in the same manner as a singing chorus is directed.

The "Twelve Days of Christmas" pantomime: The boy and girl enter carrying between them a basket containing felt cutouts of the "gifts." Each cutout is a single strip of linked figures (e.g. the "twelve lords a-leaping" is a single string of 12 figures). The five gilt curtain rings are joined. The girl sits on a bench holding the basket and the boy holds aloft the simulated partridge in a pear tree. Together they try to pull each item out of the basket as it is sung in the song. You can imagine the pandemonium that ensues by the time they get to the last verse, trying to pull up each of the 12 items as fast as the song announces them much to the delight of the congregation! The players exit with sighs of relief.

As the Junior Choir sings "Silent Night" the mother and baby take their places on the bench. The Speaking Chorus names the virtues as gifts from the congregation to the child. The small-gift-bearers, one by one, approach the baby pantomiming gift-giving. With the singing of "We Three Kings" the mother and baby return to their seats in the congregation.

The Light Bearers, each carrying a lighted taper, enter as their names are invoked and space themselves before the congregation. They wear ponchos of various colors and materials: burlap for Australopithecus; gold for Zarathustra; green for Brother Hindu; purple for the Noble Roman; Turquoise for the Egyptian; red for Judah; white for Sweet Child Jesus.

For reasons of safety the order of service should remind people that they need to exercise care and vigilance in handling the lighted candles and, that holly and mistletoe are toxic and (if they are distributed to the congregation) care needs to be taken to prevent children from eating them.

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2006

# A Service of Installation

by

John Vlahos

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**2006**

## A Service of Installation

*Note: Some of the metaphors and other phrases refer to the architecture and setting in the woods of the Westport, Connecticut church and will need to be modified to fit the architecture and setting of your church.*

*A speech choir speaks the Chorus lines.*

### **Prelude**

#### **Processional Hymn:** “As Tranquil Streams”

#145 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

#253 in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*

#### **Chorus:**

In the beginning was the woods—  
And the woods opened wide its arms  
To receive us.  
A fellowship of seekers were we—  
Drawn together  
Out of common need,  
To seek meaning  
In the Eternal—  
In that which was,  
In that which is,  
In that which yet may be!

### **Anthem**

#### **Chorus:**

In the beginning,  
Inarticulate human beings danced.  
They danced—  
Invoking and propitiating  
The gods of the wood and the cave,  
Exorcising the spirit demons  
Of sickness and of death.  
In supplication and in protest,  
They danced—  
Seeking to give form  
To wordless fears and inchoate yearnings.

#### **Congregational Response:**

Human as we are,  
Having found utterance,  
Speaking in many tongues,  
No less muted are we  
In our congregational silence  
As we sit here tonight,  
Enfolded by woods,  
Secure  
In the hushed, dark beauty of its presence,  
Seeking meaning anew  
In this cave of our own making:  
This wood-girt sanctuary,  
This church,  
This home!

**Chorus:**

There was first a circle  
For the threshing of grain.  
People moved about it,  
Singing.  
Others gathered around  
To listen, to reply—  
And became  
Chorus!

The gods were summoned—  
And in the summing  
People, who were human,  
Became gods.

They gathered again  
In the vaulting cathedrals,  
Playing out the mysteries of their faith,  
Aspiring toward the furthest buttress,  
In the everlasting outreach  
Of the human heart.

For centuries  
The church has remained  
The sanctuary of human dreams.  
Violated.  
It has remained inviolate!  
Persecuted,  
It has prevailed!

**Congregational Response:**

We are the sum  
Of its prevailing  
And of its dreaming.  
And this building  
Is more than home,  
More than haven.  
This building is our fulfillment,  
The expression  
Of our accumulated need  
Repeated in glass and wood,  
Beam and buttress,  
Stone and slab.  
It is the embodiment  
Of all our yearnings—  
The symbol of our love  
For one another!

**Hymn:** “May Nothing Evil Cross This Door  
#1 in *Singing the Living Tradition*  
#159 in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*

**Chairperson:**

Thus far have we come,  
Bound together  
In the continuity of our beliefs  
And the growing power  
Of our love for one another—  
Given new dimensions  
And new strength  
By the creative leadership  
Of those who have guided us.

*The Chorus calls out, one at a time, the names of church leaders from the past—founders, ministers, lay leaders, etc. When each name is called the Chairperson responds with a one or two sentence about the person.*

**Chairperson:**

These leaders have given that continuity  
Without which no church can survive,  
No congregation flourish.  
Through the continuity of their ministry,  
Love and belief have become firmly rooted  
In our hearts.  
And now,  
In this springtime of our maturing,  
We await its flowering.

**Chorus:**

For  
We are like a great ship,  
Landlocked and earthbound—  
Ever in need of a captain  
Keeping watch on the North Star  
Overhead,  
Setting us on our course  
In this companion journey,  
This handheld search,  
This sharing and this striving,  
Compacted by this small human family,  
Family of many families,  
Family of brothers and sisters,  
Wives and husbands,  
Children and parents,  
All joined together  
In a mutual longing for meaning  
In this life  
And in the eternity  
That is all our loves!

**Chairperson:**

We ask now that the representatives of the Search Committee  
bring [name of person being installed] into our midst.

In this seeking,  
We have sought you out, [name].  
Sought you  
And submitted into your hands  
The most precious of our dreams.  
Take it now, [name].

**Chorus:**

Cherish it.  
Hold it fast.  
Feed and nurture it.  
Give it scope and dimension,  
Power and vitality.  
With thrust and tension,  
Make it to soar—  
High, make it soar,  
Higher still  
Than we have dreamed,  
Farther aloft  
Than our collected vision  
Has ever taken us—  
Toward all the distant wonders  
Of our communal comprehension!

**Chorus:**

Succor us also  
In our times of need.  
Uplift our hearts  
When they would falter.  
Illumine our joys  
And give substance  
To our pleasures,  
That they may all transcend  
The transiency of each moment.

Instruct us as well,  
For there is no end to learning,  
And all living is but a beginning  
To learning.

**Chairperson:**

Will the members of the [name of church] please rise  
and repeat with me as indicated.

We lay no charge upon you.  
We ask only this—

**Chairperson and Members:**

That, with love, you will lead us toward love,  
With insight, toward understanding,  
With humbleness toward humility,  
With caring toward commitment,  
With joy, toward fulfillment.

Lead us in all these ways  
And we shall construct about you  
A sheltering home  
Of love and companionship,  
Outstretched hands, and welcoming hearts.

We and our children,  
And their children to come,  
One and all,  
We do so pledge,  
This night!

**Minister** *may write his/her own response or use the following:*

I assume the duties of this ministry  
With feelings of both joy and fear—  
Joy for the opportunity you place in my hands,  
And fear for the responsibility you have placed beside it.  
I accept the embrace of your love  
In the hope that I can return it  
From you I ask love and understanding,  
Concern and dedicated labor  
To the end that together  
We can transform hope into fulfillment,  
Dream into reality.  
Together may we seek  
Meanings and values for ourselves.  
Together may we seek  
To make the world a better place  
In which all people can live  
In peace and goodwill.

**Unison Meditation:**

Hear us when we speak,  
For we are not ciphered groundlings  
In our timeless yearnings  
And our ageless dreamings!

Standing in this company of friends—  
Unfettered by creed, untouched by dogma—  
We are the glorious sum of every person,  
Reaching out in growing numbers  
Toward the blessed infinity of love  
And the steadfast comfort of unanswerable eternity.  
Amen.

**Anthem**

**Sermon**

**Recessional Hymn:** “Not in Vain the Distance Beacons”  
#143 in *Singing the Living Tradition*  
#195 in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*

**Benediction by the Minister:**

Standing before this green altar, Earth,  
Awash on all sides by this sea of trees—  
The North Star forever beckoning overhead—  
Let us, hand in hand,  
In love's name venture forth  
From this hallowed spot,  
Joined  
In the sweet fellowship  
Of this human family,  
Now and forevermore!  
Amen.

**Choral Amen**

**Postlude**

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