

## **Keeping Up the Good Work**

Dennis Greene

Channing Memorial Church

March 2, 2008

I'm Dennis Greene, Property Committee Co-Chair, along with Chris Laudon. Last Week Chris and Amy reminded us of the unique place in intellectual and social history people like William Ellery Channing and his followers occupied. So well regarded were they that when it came to establish this Memorial to Channing, people from all over the United States and Europe contributed money to see that it was built. That was in 1880.

The first service, the service of consecration of Channing Memorial Church, was held on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1881. The donors were acknowledged, especially those who paid for the magnificent stained glass windows that we see today. But the sanctuary was still in progress. At that time there were no bells in the steeple. They were still being cast and would be installed at Christmastime that same year. There was no organ for the choir, although there was a piano that had been donated by Joseph Hale, a member of the congregation from New York. It was also noted that there was no fence around the property, and that the decoration of the interior side walls and the vacant ceiling panels above us would have to wait for additional donations.

The Rev. Charles T. Brooks, former minister of the Newport congregation for over 30 years, and whose presence is represented in the fine sculpture by Augustus St-Gaudens on the wall behind you, was Chairman of the fund raising committee. Within the next two years he did raise money for a perimeter fence and for an organ, but as you can see, the wall and ceiling decorations are still in waiting. Dr. Brooks also announced a collection for, I quote, "An Endowment Fund, the proceeds of which are to be used to keep the Memorial edifice in perpetual insurance and repair," unquote. Rev. Brooks died in 1883 with some unfinished Channing business left to others.

I was thinking about our properties and what they mean not only to us, but to members of the community who may just walk or drive by, or who attend a lecture or musical performance here, or who might have been married here, or know about us in so many other ways. I was thinking about this on Thursday when I was looking at the intense activity of the workmen scurrying about in all three of our buildings. There were furnace repair people in Channing House, an asbestos removal team in our undercroft, and Fire Alarm installers in the Parish Hall. I was thinking that Charles Timothy Brooks would be encouraged by the support we continue to enjoy from so many people within and outside our immediate community, 127 years past that service of Consecration in 1881.

Last year we all made a commitment to staying here, expanding our programs, growing our congregation and doing what is necessary to act as good stewards of our historic buildings, grounds, and artwork. This year we are developing plans and putting them into action in many areas. You have already heard of greening our congregation and social justice outreach, and expanding Religious Education.

For the past three years I have worked with members of the Property Committee. I have to say it's been a lot of fun, most of the time. You get to worry about the heat, the plumbing, the lights, the tenants, leaks in the roof, all of that. You get to tap into the long memories of people like Russ Milham, who Chaired the Committee for fifteen years, and Barbara Russell-Willett, who chaired it for five, and to work with a group of talented and very hands-on people. To me the real fun is in looking at our old buildings and understanding how they were put together and how to keep them standing for the next generation.

We have had some successful Property Committee initiatives during the last year. I'll just mention a few. The Property Committee worked with the Religious Education Committee to reclaim space in the basement of Channing House. Now there is a very nice RE Office and safe space for Channing Youth. We now have a Library and Meeting Room in Channing House. Our Parish Hall has been repainted. We have an Art Gallery in place of bulletin boards and former clutter. We've had to install fire alarms in the all the buildings. As you can see, we are not very happy with the way they look in our Sanctuary, and we're working to make some compromises with our installers. Some of this is not the fun part.

Those were the smaller projects, the ones we paid for with our money, and largely worked on ourselves. I want to speak today about the bigger projects, the ones that are so large that they tend to be mind boggling, the ones where we need a lot of help from our friends.

About three or four years ago we had several stained glass window consultants examine our fifteen windows. 125 year old windows need to be maintained about once each generation. To be honest, it took me a long time to develop a sense of appreciation for stained glass windows, but like anything else, once you start looking into things, learning about them, you gain an appreciation. Now I'm a big fan. Not many churches have a John LaFarge window. We have two. Both are from very early in his career. The one behind you is one of his largest. The one to my right is missing. We'll talk more about that later. We also have a window by Donald MacDonald, a student of LaFarge. The Sower is more than a window. It has become, for many of us, our symbol and there are windows by other great artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Stained Glass movement, S. P. Belcher, and Samuel West.

Our consultant showed us how the Samuel West five panel window in the East Vestibule had numerous cracks and even some missing fragments. Wind and water were coming right into the Vestibule. To prevent catastrophic loss, this window needed to be repaired ASAP. The estimate for the repair of the window and its rotted frames came to about \$30,000. Wow.

At the same time we noticed a lot of plaster damage and flaking paint near the Charles Brooks sculpture behind you. Water was obviously getting into the North wall of the church, the same wall that support that big John LaFarge window. We hired

engineers who told us that the masonry was cracked and porous. Our pinnacle was ready to topple and water was creeping in through the mortar joints. The cost for repairing all this would be about \$200,000. Definitely not in our budget.

In 2006 we submitted grant applications to four organizations known to be supportive of Newport institutions. One of them had stepped forward about 20 years before, when the LaFarge window in back of you was last restored. That was the Alletta Morris McBean Charitable Trust. The other foundations were; the Prince Charitable Trusts; the Van Buren Charitable Foundation; and the Champlin Foundations. We asked for money to repair the damaged North wall and the pinnacle and to restore the stained glass window in the East Vestibule. Representatives from each foundation came to our campus and discussed the project. Much to my surprise, all four foundations decided to fund us. They all expressed great interest in our church, because of its history as a part of Newport, its architectural history and as a virtual museum of stained glass treasures. We were able to raise over \$270,000. As you know, we completed the masonry work last year. The windows will be reinstalled in the spring.

In 2007 we interviewed several stained glass experts about restoring the LaFarge window that formerly was to my right. This window, with its multiple layers of glass and painted surfaces, and with its hand poured and experimental glass formulas, required someone with experience, and there are not many people with the expertise to work on LaFarge windows. After making a field trip to look at examples of his work, we selected Victor Rothman of Yonkers, NY to do the restoration. His estimate was an eye-popping \$90,000. We submitted an application to the Alletta Morris McBean Charitable Trust and after an interview and site visit we were given the good news that we would be funded for the entire amount. The window is presently at the Rothman Studio and should be ready in the fall.

Last year we applied for a grant to replace the sanctuary's copper gutters and downspouts that were leaking and dripping through many holes and defects. These gutters had to be fabricated to resemble the originals. Fortunately, Newport has skilled artisans to do this work, and the John Randall Company has been working on the project all year, not just on the Sanctuary, but also the Parish Hall. This project was funded with a \$23,000 grant from the Prince Charitable Trusts.

Last year we also applied for support in restoring the floor beneath your feet. The tiles, some of which are asbestos containing, were installed in the 1940's to replace carpeting from an earlier era. Beneath all of this is a beautiful fir floor, that was enjoyed by that first congregation in 1881. The iron pipes that you may be resting your feet on are remnants of an old hot water heating system. They are connected to pipes down below. Those pipes were asbestos-covered, until yesterday, when our contractor finished removing it; then all the pipes will be taken out; then the asbestos tiles will be taken up during the summer. Finally the floor will be restored to the original wood. This floor project will be funded by a \$50,000 grant we received from the Van Beuren Charitable Foundation last November.

To quote Humphrey Bogart, “Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.” We need to cultivate our friends outside our congregation who want to support us. Especially, we shouldn’t be afraid to ask for their help. I think we have the potential to develop an active and growing grant writing group to help us sustain and expand our programs. Channing is very important to Newport and to people who visit our city, and to art and architecture historians. Grant writing can be fun. It is also a heck of a lot of work. There are deadlines to meet, reports to write, follow-up letters and forms to fill out. We are planning to interview some professional free lance grant writers, to see if they can help us, by working with our volunteer committee, to do better research and better management of our grants. If any of you are interested and have the time to spare, join us.

In summary, I wanted to bring you all up to date with where we are on some of our larger projects and how we fund them. This is Canvass time. We have exciting goals this year and our budget will meet those expectations. We are grateful for your support, for your dollars, your ideas, and your energy. When thinking about Canvass this year, remember that back in 1880 Charles Brooks and his friends were looking everywhere to find the money to get us started. They succeeded and many former congregations kept us going. We and our friends will carry on in that same tradition.

## **Disney in Newport**

Chris Yalanis

Channing Memorial Church

March 2, 2008

Good morning. I am Chris Yalanis, Vice President of Channing Memorial Church. There are plenty of reasons that the role of Vice President is an exciting and fulfilling position. Of course, the pay and benefits are unbelievable. Seriously though, the Vice President's main role and responsibility is to manage the annual Canvass – which is actually a lot of fun.

Speaking of fun, one day when thinking about the Canvass I also found myself thinking about my last trip to Disney World in Florida. If there's one thing that Disney does well – for me at least – it's that they make me feel like I'm happy to open my wallet and spend, spend, spend. Everyone at Disney is so happy, smiling, eager to help, it's so clean and just so much fun for people of all ages. The happy memories created there are worth every dollar spent. Now, this can present financial dangers, so one's got to set reasonable limits before succumbing to the aura of enjoyment.

I think the reason that Disney is so successful in this regard, is that they've created an environment that you WANT to be part of. It's fun to be there! Everyone's having a good time. Even exasperated parents trying to manage wild and tired 5 year olds at 3 in the afternoon in 95 degree 100% humidity heat have grins on their faces from ear to ear! And what's not to love? The weather is great, there are games, rides, good food, lovable characters, science, fireworks, and everyone is just soooooo happy!

Well, I'm here to tell you that Channing is a lot like Disney World. Disney has, the Castle in the Magic Kingdom. We have, the Steeple. Disney has lovable characters like Mickey Mouse! We have Tom Beall and Amy Freedman (who is also a quite talented Curious George). Disney has music we all know and love, and we have our choir to inspire us and lift our spirits high. Disney has fabulous fireworks, we have our flaming chalice! Disney is a place where adults and children alike feel like anything is possible, that the sky is the limit. Don't you leave church on Sundays feeling the same way? Most importantly, Channing is a place where you can feel good too.

At some point in every day, I find that I'm thinking about Channing. That's another one of the benefits of being Vice President! Really though, that's a good thing, because I really like Channing – and a lot of people like Channing Church. When I'm here in the church, I see folks smiling and enjoying one another's company. In the Parish Hall, more smiling. Even at Hot Topics, smiling.

When I think about what we stand for, more good thoughts come to mind. This is because we stand for good principles. We support humanity in its endeavor to create a caring, compassionate world to live within. This is the life worth living. And thus, supporting Channing, whether it's on clean-up day, at the auction, or in teaching a RE

class, is enjoyable too. It's not 'another thing I have to do'. It's an investment we make in making our lives better.

Recently I was speaking with friends about their church's canvass. They went on about how much they were being asked to give, complaining about where the money was going and how it would be spent, talking down the limited programs offered... and just before I extended the invitation for them to join us one Sunday, I thought about what they were really saying about their relationship to their church. To them, it was taxing to be a member – emotionally, physically, and financially.

And that's what makes our congregation different. That's why we're growing, size-wise, program-wise, and intellectually. It's why the UUA movement is reaching out around the world – to satisfy the void for a mindset that everyone can enjoy being part of.

Whether we give your time, your effort, or your monies – being part of Channing Memorial Church is an investment in our lives. It's an investment in the same sense that we invest to achieve something. If getting another educational degree is something that will make my life better, then I don't view the cost of classes as undesirable, I view the cost as something I WANT to embrace. Those are the costs of doing something I've CHOSEN to make my life better. In the same way, if fixing the steeple is something I've wanted, if repairing our stained glass is something I've wanted, if modifying the choir area, or re-finishing the floors is something we've wanted, then the costs of doing so are just simply that – costs of doing so. We don't fear them. We calculate them and fund them. They are means to our ends.

Today, we begin the process of funding those means. Today is the official kick-off of the Canvass for Fiscal Year 2009. This year, under the title of 'Green and Growing' we have stretched our Vision for Channing.

We are Green: Please say "We are Green!" when I raise my hand' ... ((if not loud enough – tell them to put some Miracle Grow on that effort!))

(Raise hand) We are Green as our Social Justice committee makes tremendous strides toward improving Channing's footprint on this Earth.

(Raise hand) We are Green as our property committee works hand in hand to build and rebuild our properties within this scope.

(Raise hand) We are Green as our Religious Education programs grow and educate our youth and adults according to our principles.

(Raise hand) And we are Green as we wisely manage our financial resources toward our goals.

We are Growing: And now, please say "We are Growing!" when I raise my hand.

(Raise Hand) We are Growing as our congregation grows in quantity and quality.

(Raise Hand) We are Growing as we expand our reach into the community

(Raise Hand) We are Growing as we reclaim spaces at Channing to meet and function within – and as we design new spaces for future programs.

(Raise Hand) and We are Growing every time we invite someone on this journey with us.

Thank you.

We are Green and Growing. And, I'd like to take a minute to give you a little something from this year's Canvass Committee. (Hand out packages). First, a health note...these are sunflower seeds (salted), so keep your distance if you're allergic...and they're processed in a place that also processes peanuts.

Remember the story of Jack and the Beanstalk? Well I'm here today to tell you a little secret about the magic in those seeds. You see, the magic comes from the heart. And with enough magic, with enough love, and with enough caring and compassion, these seeds will grow, and grow and grow.

And just as the Sower threw seeds everywhere, never knowing which would find root and grow, so can we spread our magic to everyone around us. And as we continue to do so, we will fill the void that people are searching to find – and we will continue to grow.

Over the course of the next month, our team of 40 plus canvass Captains will make their way to listen to your personal story about Channing. What kind of magic do you envision growing in these seeds? Share your story as we share our plans for investing in Channing's future. If you simply cannot wait to get involved, please contact me or Bill Hawkins and we'll let you know who your canvasser is.

In closing, I want to tell you one more Disney story. The last time we visited Disney, my son Nicholas was 6 years old. It was the first time he was tall enough to ride the "big coasters". Now, if any of you have ever ridden Space Mountain, you know it is a good sized roller coaster. But what makes it great, is that it's entirely in the dark. Nicholas was pretty nervous about getting on it, but his Mom, Mohini, (who loves big roller coasters) kept telling him how exhilarating the ride would be, and that he would be safe, and she would hold his hand so he'd feel OK. Well, as you can guess, he loved it. And, then, having experienced one of the most thrilling episodes of his life, proceeded to go back for 4 more rides.

Folks, our congregation is growing, and now we're getting big enough to make some real progress. There will always be challenges ahead of our congregation. So, even though we're heading into the unknown, we can all hold hands, be brave, and enjoy the ride. The goals we'll achieve will make it all worth while.