

Farewell

**Rev. Stephen Ames
UU Church in Eugene
June 6, 2010**

CALL TO WORSHIP

Walking Toward Morning, by Victoria Safford

You know, we do it every day.
Every morning we go out blinking into the glare of our freedom,
into the wilderness of work and the world,
making maps as we go, looking for signs that we're on the right path. And on
some good days we walk right out of our oppressions,
those things that press us down from the outside
or (as often) from the inside;
we shake off the shackles of fear, prejudice, timidity,
closed-mindedness, selfishness, self-righteousness,
and claim our freedom outright, terrifying as it is –
our freedom to be human, and humane.

Every morning, every day,
we leave our houses, not knowing if it will be for the last time,
and we decide what we'll take with us,
what we'll carry:
how much integrity, how much truth-telling,
how much compassion (in case somebody along the way may need some),
how much arrogance, how much anger, how much humor,
how much willingness to change and to be changed,
to grow and to be grown.
How much faith and hope, how much love and gratitude –
you pack these with your lunch and your medications,
your date book and your papers.
Every day, we gather what we think we'll need,
pick up what we love and all that we so far believe,
put on our history,
shoulder our experience and memory,
take inventory of our blessings,
and we start walking toward morning.

Come, let us worship together.

SERMON

Just over three years ago, when I accepted this congregation's invitation to serve as minister, I did not anticipate leaving so soon. I came with excitement and high hopes, as did many in the congregation. In fact the inevitable fall from that initial excitement, often called a "honeymoon period" for a ministry, was part of the story of this ministry.

For some time, even though things were quite difficult, especially in the business side of the church, I was determined to see this ministry through at least to the move to the church's new home at 13th and Chambers. This past year several experiences led me to conclude that I would not keep this personal commitment, and I announced my resignation at the April 8 Board meeting.

I now wish you the best as you move forward, and in particular in your transition, not just to a new building, but also to a new stage in the life of this congregation. I wish you a healthy, long-term ministry that will provide you the stability and leadership you will require to grow into your new home. I wish you courage and clarity to see and address obstacles to your goals, and I wish you compassion and forgiveness. I wish you all of the things I strive to cultivate in myself, as named by Rev. Victoria Safford in our call to worship: integrity, truth-telling, compassion, humor, faith, hope, love and gratitude.

My decision to leave, while strong and clear in April, was not lightly made: I grappled with it for a year. While I experienced many disappointments and frustrations, I also experienced many blessings, things for which to be grateful.

I thank you for the warmth and caring I witnessed here. I saw older members in particular cared for without fuss or seeming effort. This kind of caring so often comes naturally and joyfully here.

I thank you for the music. The choirs are led and perform with a spirit of joyful excellence, often creating a sense of reverence, so critical to any religious undertaking.

I thank you for visual art, fabric art especially – the many-hands quilt, this stole, the art galleries in the library. I thank you for your poetry, especially in the Thresholds collections.

I am grateful for magical creatures' camp, which my son loved, and religious education classes where children are engaged lovingly as individuals and invited into shared values of respect, curiosity, and kindness.

I thank you for providing a safe, nurturing haven for so many youth, where life-affirming values are fostered for young people who regularly face negative social pressures.

I was touched by the healthy, respectful, careful process of your decision-making in deciding to find a new property and selecting one. Despite tensions at different points, the church has united for this. Congregational input has been real, without stalling the process. The process has been meaningfully inclusive while also forward-moving.

I thank you for the Small Group Program, meeting real needs with creativity and care, well-managed with a good mix of tradition and innovation, and providing spiritual growth for facilitators as well as participants. I enjoyed assisting this program.

I thank you for the privilege of working with and leading your strong staff, who lead so much of what I am now thanking you for.

I thank you for your social justice aspirations, beginning to find fulfillment in recent months, and for your generosity to other groups doing good works through the monthly Community Collection. I felt proud on third Sundays.

I carry with me positive experiences, blessings for which I am grateful. This beautiful property, a church leader's meditation bell, the warm hospitality of many members, the fierce attention to detail of some others, and those many with a passion for learning, in particular people I've gotten to know in my classes and workshops – people with good humor, a willingness to engage and go deeply, to challenge, and to ask meaningful questions.

My family was touched by a warm pre-wedding celebration you held for us last June. We thank you.

I thank you for our singing, especially Spirit of Life, a sung prayer.

I thank you for trusting me as your guide through life's passages, weddings, child blessings, and memorial services. I thank you for trusting me as your minister in many other ways as well.

I apologize to you for any wrongs or hurts I may have caused you. Some hurts arose from a clash or at least difference in values with individuals, and that is to be expected. But other hurts came about at least in part from my own flaws, from handling a situation poorly. I apologize for these hurts.

Saying hello and saying good-bye may be the two most important lessons in life. With these thanks, and with these blessings, I am saying good-bye. Aside from being on call for a pastoral emergency for one more month, I will no longer be functioning as your minister when I leave here today with my family. I will

not be coming here or continuing relationships with people who I have known through the role of minister, as I am starting a new life and you are starting a new chapter in your shared life, with new ministerial leadership.

And so I am saying good-bye. My son, Toraja, asked me to let you know that he says good-bye, too. My entire family wishes you well.

The choir will now sing Ubi Caritas, a Latin piece that translates, "Where charity and love are found, God is there."

BENEDICTION

May we see in each end a beginning, and in each beginning, an end.

May we integrate the gifts of our past, all of them.

May we turn to the future with poise and faith.

Blessed be and Amen.