

UU Fellowship of the Rappahannock
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Groundbreaking

Digging In, Reaching Out
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The bird on top of the car beside mine in the seminary parking lot was enormous. It was 8:30 in the morning; I had just arrived for work and I opened my door before I noticed the bird, sitting on the car instead of in the tree right beside it, his huge curved back turned carelessly to the people parking, coming in to work. Even I, who know very little about wild birds, recognized this one as a hawk. It was an impressive creature. I stopped moving, astonished, and then slowly eased out of the car, trying very hard not to startle the hawk and drive him away. I needn't have bothered; he had no interest at all in the humans who were gathering to admire him and wonder about his presence. As we watched, a mockingbird approached. "Stay away from him," I advised. I, who believe heartily in the power and beauty of the spoken word, know intellectually that my language does not communicate information to other species, but I worked in elementary schools for a long time, and I instinctively speak when I see little tiny things about to do something stupid. The mockingbird paid no attention to me, naturally, and flew right up to that hawk and hit him in the head with his beak. I cringed, expecting mayhem. The hawk paid no attention. The mockingbird kept after him, fussing and bothering and pecking until at last the hawk lifted his vast wings and flew across the street. The mockingbird followed right on his tail, and continued to harass the hawk even when he found a higher perch on a telephone

pole beside the Baptist seminary parking lot. "Let him alone, mockingbird," I cautioned. "He's over there with the Baptists, you don't need to keep messing with him. He's going to squash you flat." But that's not what happened. With one final aggressive flourish, the mockingbird flew away, and the hawk settled down on his new perch. We human observers concluded that the mockingbird had a nest nearby, and was willing to take the risk of threatening a hawk to preserve its safety. Once the hawk was across the street, and fiercely warned, the mockingbird went on about the business of the morning, returning, I like to imagine, to his nest. "There's a sermon it that somewhere," said one human observer. "Oh, yes, that'll preach!" said another gleefully. And, as you see, they were right.

It is an act of courage to build the first Unitarian Universalist church in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula...the first one in six counties. It would be so much easier to stay at the Women's Club, and club is a good word for what you *could* be there. It would be so much easier to get together with friends, good conversation, good food, some ritual on Sunday mornings, let your strongest reason for coming together be to take care of each other. Yet you chose--- when you had other choices---you chose to have all the conversations, the disagreements, the searching for just the right site, the raising of funds, all the meetings, meetings, meetings, and that's to say nothing of the physical labor...so that you could arrive at this day. So you could begin the process of becoming a physical presence in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula.

Not just a home of your own, but a lighthouse for others in this area, shining out an invitation and a declaration.

You have recognized that you are people of privilege in this area, and that privilege requires you to speak out to established systems...speak out for justice, equity, and compassion in the lives of others. Building a church is also taking a stand, and that stand will be anti-racist, anti-oppression. You will stand on the side of love for everybody, and that means bisexual, lesbian, gay, and transgender people as well as heterosexuals.

Starting today, you are establishing a place from which, for decades into the future, you will defend your territory, these six counties, from the larger and more powerful forces of prejudice and economic injustice and oppression. You will not care how large they are, and you may take stands that look foolish to people who don't know you very well. But this is your place, and Unitarian Universalism is your faith. If, years from now, you remember the story about that hawk and that mockingbird, please be sure to remember this: the hawk left when the mockingbird challenged him. He didn't fight, he didn't do damage...he flew away. In the face of a threat that was larger and more powerful, the mockingbird's courage paid off.

Stand for justice in this church that you are about to build. Love those that will become your neighbors. You will make a difference here.

And so may it be.

