

Opening Words
Bill Bechman
Sunday, September 9, 2018
All Souls Church, New YorkCity

Homecoming Sunday! I'm Bill Bechman, whether this is your home for decades, or you're visiting for the first time, ***Welcome Home.***

I'm knee-deep in history. Some of you know, I'm border-line crazy. I'm hearing voices. The voices of those who came before us, people gathering as a worship community in 1819. My mother's church in Indiana was established in 1829. Her funeral was there on September the 7th, 2001. This August, after years of declining membership, the congregation met for the last time in their beautiful, historic church. It was sold and will be divided into condos.

A friend was visiting us from Florida. At her country church in Florida, like ours, donor names were on the pews. All that was lost, because her church has been burned to the ground, twice, by unknown arsonists.

We all yearn for sanctuary with others. Finding hallowed ground helps us to connect with our ancestors and to thank them for their courage and for showing us the way.

On Wednesday evening, September 12th, 2001, the day after the unspeakable tragedy of 9/11, this sanctuary was filled. There were words of consolation and soulful music. My most vivid memory: an almost endless line of people coming forward and lighting votive candles, one by one.

Because of this congregation, I don't really feel crazy. In this turbulent, uncertain time, I feel hopeful. I can't articulate what is coming, but I believe in goodness, and in justice, and in movement toward a future of universal unity, way beyond my understanding and my ability and my lifetime.

Let's hear voices together. The voices of people who will come together many years after us. May everyone, everywhere find sanctuary where they can be welcomed and with all their diversity, together find love and peace.

And now, please stand in spirit as we say together our bond of union.

In the freedom of the truth, And in the spirit of love, We unite for the worship of God, And the service of all.