

**Opening Words**  
**Given by Matt Brandenburgh**  
**April 2, 2017**

Good morning. Welcome to All Souls. My name is Matt Brandenburgh, and I've been coming here since 2009. I grew up in an Episcopal Church in Oklahoma. Due to my parents, my sister and I were both highly active members of the church community: we went most Sundays, I served as an acolyte, sang in the church choir, and went to monthly youth group meetings. My family moved while I was in high school, and as my beliefs had shifted during that time, I never got involved in a church after that. I eventually noticed the absence of a weekly community of positive people which I had taken for granted as a child, and when I came up to New York, I knew one of the first things I wanted to do was fill that gap. On my first or second weekend here in the city, I came to a summer service downstairs in Reidy Friendship Hall and immediately found my home. At All Souls, you can be yourself. You don't have to treat this as part of the daily grind of New York City. You don't have to put on your game face for each encounter, you don't have to impress anyone to be accepted. You just have to be yourself, and that's enough. And to me, the most fascinating thing about All Souls is the unique story each and every member of the congregation brings of how they got here. Each story different and each is valued. I invite you to come downstairs during coffee hour and say hi, and tell me your story.

Now, please rise with me, in body or in spirit, and join me in reciting the 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.