

## Clipping the Church

A sermon by the Rev. Jackie Clement  
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Sociologists have a name for it. The Diderot Effect it's called.

I decided I hated my kitchen curtains so I bought some fabric, borrowed a friend's sewing machine and made new ones. There was fabric left over so might as well use it to reupholster the kitchen chairs to match the curtains. That would be cute. Well, except that the new fabric makes all the dings in the painted part of the chairs so much more noticeable. Paint the chairs! Which makes the table look sad and tired. Paint the table! Which makes the walls look dingy. Paint the kitchen. Before you know it I'm painting the whole house including the cathedral ceiling and two-story walls in the family room. This is quickly followed by hand surgery to repair the damage I did to myself in fixing the house. So when I started here at UUBN in 2010 and they told me we needed new furnaces, I said to myself, "Avoid the surgery part."

The Diderot Effect. We did need new furnaces, but it didn't make sense to put them in until we fixed the problem of the heat leaking out the windows. Well, it turned out it leaked as much through the foundation, so we had to insulate the foundation. And as long as we're digging up the foundation and we need to replace the patio anyway, might as well slap an addition on the building. Hopefully, in December we will vote on whether to finally replace those furnaces! It's possible that what replaces the furnaces is a geothermal system, which would allow us to further live out our values as a religious community, but one way or another we need to keep the heating and cooling flowing.

But still, we are only mid-Diderot. For now that we have this wonderful and much needed classroom space we need more room here in the sanctuary for the parents of those students who will fill the classrooms. And with the organ reaching the end of its life we have to consider the future of our music program and redesign the sanctuary not only for extra seating but to maintain its integrity as a worship space. And then once we can fit everyone in the building we have to find somewhere for them to park, and doesn't that just raise the whole question of the septic system and running pipes through St John's parking lot to tie into the town system. The Diderot Effect, still fully in motion.

But today we pause, mid-effect, to celebrate where we are because where we are is quite beautiful and it's worth taking a look at the view from here. Five years ago or maybe even more we started talking about the useful life of the furnaces. It started with a few folks from the Building Committee babying it along, and then someone said it out loud, "We're going to need new furnaces." The conversation started to widen and more voices joined in. What's the best way to go? How much will it cost? Eventually, the board became part of the discussion, and board members met and considered and heard reports and Buildings and Grounds called in experts and measured and tapped and tested and drew plans. Partners, children and spouses waited (patiently for the most part) keeping dinner warm or getting homework done while meetings took place. Conversations grew,

newsletter articles were written, sermons were preached, tempers got heated and cooled down again.

Architects were hired, plans drawn and paid for, canvassers went forth intrepidly to find the money to back the dream. Plans were redrawn and permits sought. Votes were held and plans were redrawn again and city officials delivered exasperating news and permits were sought. Again. Requests for bids went out, builders were hired and others didn't take it too well, and everyone talked and listened and talked some more while the staff trudged resolutely through the parking lot to get from one end of the building to the other and we all made do with the kitchen door, just like family. And all of us searched our hearts and our wallets to see how we could support the dream. And here it is today, made real. We come now to the time of celebration.

We come now to clip our church. You may be wondering why it is that in the middle of the pledge month I titled my sermon "Clipping the Church." I assure you it has nothing to do with the finances. The word "clipping" is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word *clyppan* meaning to embrace or clasp. Clipping the church is an ancient custom of showing love for your church. Clipping is synonymous with "clasping" and in clipping the church, the congregation, holding hands, forms a circle around the outside of the building show their care for the church.

It is a custom still practiced in a few places in Great Britain and like all ancient customs has taken on various practices in different locations. In some towns it is only the children that ring the church. In some the people dance rather than stand around the church. In others a traditional puppy dog pie is served, a cake with a small china dog baked inside. No one really knows how clipping the church came about. One theory is that it derives from an earlier pagan practice of encircling the altar.

However it began and however it is observed, clipping the church is meant to show the people's care for their religious home. Of course, there are other ways to show care for your church. We do it all the time through committee work, at fellowship events, by teaching religious education classes and mowing the lawn. Generally, by showing up and pitching in. We did it through all the many, many contributions of time and money and skill as we built our new addition. So many people had a hand in what we celebrate today that I could not possibly name them all so I won't even try. My gratitude for what they offered is no less real for that. I do, however, want to lift up one extraordinary example of care, as remarkable for the quiet way it was done as for the care that thought to do it at all.

Where the old painted ceiling meets the new natural wood ceiling runs right through Room 12, used for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes. But if you walk into the room, the ceiling appears all the same throughout. That is because Suan, very carefully and lovingly, painted a faux wood ceiling, complete with wood knots over the older section. The painting is so good that if you did not know you would never even notice it was painted at all. And if you look with care, you will see that the knot closest to the door is in the shape of a heart. Now that is showing care, to spend hours doing what no one might ever notice but leaves a symbol of love for everyone that enters.

So today we will show our collective care by clipping our church. Clipping is traditionally done on Easter Monday or Shrove Tuesday; sometimes on the day for the church's patron saint. But it is fitting that we do it on the Sabbath, that we dedicate our new space today. For the Sabbath is a day set apart, out of normal time; a day to reflect on work done, to consider whether it is good, to appreciate all we are given in our lives; a day to prepare ourselves for the work yet to be done. This is the model set from ancient times according to the biblical account of creation. God created the universe and all that is within it in six days and on the seventh rested and saw that it was good.

Thus the seventh day becomes the Sabbath. If nothing else, as former UUA Moderator Gini Courter says, "The Biblical story of the six-day creation project is even more awe-inspiring after you've built a church building. We can already abstract one truth: it takes less time to create a universe than to construct a church building. For a church, the permits alone take more than six days."

But there is another way that it is fitting that we come to this time of dedication on the Sabbath—because it reminds us to rest. It calls us to step back from the work of the other days and to judge the rightness of what we have done. Yes, there are other projects waiting to be done, but there will *always* be other projects waiting to be done. They are important projects and I do not suggest that we just file them away and forget them, but I am suggesting that without Sabbath time they will mean nothing to us. Without Sabbath time we will not have the energy or enthusiasm to appreciate them and quite possibly we may not have the energy or enthusiasm to finish them.

Energy and enthusiasm are critical resources in congregations. They can be slippery things and rest on tenuous ground. So when you have them, and we do have them, they need to be appreciated, nurtured and not taken for granted. With these vital resources we can accomplish great things. Like many natural resources they are renewable, but renewal takes time, and sometimes it takes intention. Just as we are called in our tradition to be wise steward's of earth's resources we are called to be wise stewards of the church's and our own resources.

So let us enter a time of sabbath. A time for appreciation of what we have, what we have already done, a time to dream of what we might yet build. Time, not simply to sit on a rock and let life pass us by, but time to renew, time to consider, time to celebrate. May we offer our church that care—the quiet care of sabbath time where the next project demanding our attention will wait just a bit longer as we celebrate that which is already ours.

Namaste.

Por lo tanto puede ser.