

# Living stones

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## **A sermon by the Rev. Maria Pap, at a Transylvanian Communion service at the First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor, March 2, 2009**

My husband besides being an avid photographer, has the bug of stone collecting--small ones and big ones, ordinary ones and coloured ones, stones in different shapes and sizes. Wherever we go, he brings back stones. He doesn't think about the inconvenience of it--especially when we travel by plane and the weight is monitored and when the women in the family had some important shopping to do. We are the proud owners of a big collection of stones-- from pebbles to big boulders, which were carted into the garden by grateful parishioners.

In our collection we have stones from the village, the county, different parts of Transylvania and then from all the places we have ever visited abroad starting from Hungary to France, from California to Colorado or Michigan. Before I flew over, he asked me to bring him back a stone from Texas, as we've never been there before. He never labels these stones, so the pebbles are in bowls around the house, the stones in mounds in the flower beds and the boulders in the middle of the garden. I have a firm suspicion that after a while he forgets which stone comes from where--although he affirms the contrary. But I don't think this matters really much-- the stone-collecting is quite a harmless occupation, so I try to humour him. Besides [it] is quite wonderful to pick up a stone from presumably California and with it all the fond memories you have of people and places.

Human beings have always been fascinated by stones--they have played and continue to play an important part in our life. They were tools of our survival, either for building or harming, as weapons or as we built houses and catapults, fortresses and walls for keeping in, keeping out, for gathering and sheltering, for fighting and dividing. We admire the architectural splendors built by our ancestors and sometimes we exclaim: "if these walls could talk, what wonderful stories we would hear". But they do talk! According to scientists the inanimate surfaces reflect the feelings of those around them. Although this might seem farfetched, our everyday life gives plenty of examples.

Let us consider our abode. What does it take to make a house? Stone, wood, tiles, mortar and many other materials. How long does it take to build a house? Well, that depends on your budget but from a couple of weeks to a couple of years.

What does it take to make a home? Love. Love and the presence of our beloved ones-- patience and understanding, shared sadness and joys, cherished memories. How long does it take to build a home? Forever and a day as the Hungarian fairy tales say. Our home is a continuous construction site with all the mess and inconvenience but at the same time with all the joys and hopes of the unexpected.

As our bodies need the shelter and comfort of the house, so does our mind and spirit in need of a home. A home which you can find it here, in this congregation. You have the buildings, you have the space and you have the great possibility of making it a home. It is true that you have to share it with a couple of hundred of other people but that just adds to the challenge.

As the apostle writes, you are the living stones which build a spiritual house, which could make this place a home. You are the living stones of this place, the living stones of god's house. Sometimes this house is comfortable and warm, other times austere and cold. Sometimes it gives shelter from the wounds of the world, sometimes it pushes you severely out in the open. Sometimes it soothes your intellect and feelings, sometimes it challenges you and angers and frustrate you. But it is yours and it is or it could become what you want it to be.

The stones of the house are kept together by mortar. Our life's mortar is love. Love that keeps us together against all differences of life, hope, understanding, imagination. Love that keeps us together even when we fight, we disagree, we hurt each other and ourselves. Love which goes beyond the surface of our life, reaching that deep common layer of our human fragility in which we recognize each other for what we are- individual miracles of God's love.

We gathered together tonight to celebrate this home we offer and build for ourselves and each other. To celebrate the love, which unites us even in our differences, to celebrate and reinforce our community with each other, our commitment to continue being the living stones of faith, love and hope in the world. We share with each other the wine and bread to honor those who laid the foundation of our house and to strengthen our resolve in working and serving each other towards making our community the home of love. We are all stone gatherers in a way- physically or just symbolically- so let's put together the precious stones of our lives to make the house of our spirit an enduring home.

May our life and service find its place and fulfillment in the never ending construction of God's house.

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