



## UNIVERSALIST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF HAVERHILL

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Testimonial Given by Sarah Clarke  
on March 8, 2015

Good morning. My name is Sarah Clarke and I'm second generation UUCH. My grandfather, Ben Fall, Sr., joined this church in the 1950s and was the sexton here throughout the 1970s. My mother and uncle grew up here, and my cousin was the weekend and events sexton here for a few years, as well. My parents were married here, my grandfather's and uncle's funerals were officiated by the ministers at the times of their respective deaths. I spent a good portion of my childhood in this building, often on weeknights with my grandfather. I roller skated on the wooden floors downstairs; I rode my first bike around the Murray Room.

I was away from this church for many years. I married a Jewish man, converted so that any future children would enjoy widespread acceptance in their father's matrilineal religious tradition, and reared a son who has so far turned out to be a pretty observant and committed Jew.

I have come back to this church because the older I get, the more aware I become of how key the UU church was in shaping my identity. My UU heritage has informed every area of my life, from my academic work to my parenting to my choice of career. I could cite specific examples within each arena – it's certainly no coincidence that I wrote my undergraduate honors thesis on Emerson's "Self Reliance" –but for the sake of brevity I'd like to focus my comments today on a single concept that I think best captures what the church gave me, what I hope I have carried from here out into the larger world, and why it's important to me to support the church financially. This is the concept of validation.

The UU tradition, which holds as a fundamental precept a belief in the inherent worth and dignity of each person and teaches that conscience and reason ought be the foundation of belief and practice, is a deeply validating tradition.

The UU church taught me that I am free to listen to my own voice and to my own instincts. My awareness of this freedom has fueled the idealism, resilience, passion, and capacity for empathy that I believe constitute the best things I have to offer. So much of what I see in the world that troubles me, on scales ranging from the intimate and personal to the public and systematized, seems to me rooted in the phenomenon of people or institutions invalidating others by dictating to them what their experience or feeling or thought or very identity should be. This not only devalues and sometimes even destroys individuals, it depletes their life force and thereby deprives the entire human community of the gifts they might offer if not otherwise occupied fighting for their very existence. It depletes us all. I believe that the UU church heals the world through healing its congregants; those who are valued and cared for go on to value and care for others.

Emerson wrote, “Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life’s cultivation.” In the two most important and demanding undertakings of my life, my parenting and my work as a psychiatric clinician, I am guided by the conviction that the greatest gift I can present is to help others cultivate the faith that their own gifts are manifest within them if only they can tune in to their own frequency. The UU church played a crucial role in helping me learn to do that.

I support this church financially because we show what we value in our hearts through our acts in the real world. I value this building, these windows, this organ; we are privileged to come together in this beautiful space. But serving on the Board of a synagogue during my hiatus from the UU church, I became acquainted with the reality that the Heaven we don’t put much stock in anyway does not rain pennies upon us. I support it because our whip smart, passionate, and inspiring minister, our religious ed director, and the support staff deserve to be valued, deserve salaries that validate their commitment and their formidable talents. And I support it because for my entire life this church has said to me, “We believe in you. Believe in yourself.” I believe that this church, what it stands for, the way it shapes the consciousness of its members, can heal what is broken in the world. My financial support is my way of saying back, “I believe in you, too.” I hope you’ll join me.