

“Lie Back—and the Sea Will Hold You”

Lie back daughter, let your head
be tipped back in the cup of my hand.
Gently, and I will hold you. Spread
your arms wide, lie out on the stream
and look high at the gulls. A dead-
man’s float is face down. You will dive
and swim soon enough where this tidewater
ebbs to the sea. Daughter, believe
me, when you tire on the long thrash
to your island, lie up, and survive.
As you float now, where I held you
and let go, remember when fear
cramps your heart what I told you:
lie gently and wide to the light- year
stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you.
Philip Booth

Yesterday morning about fifty people gathered in this
room
with hope, curiosity, openness, tiredness, questioning,
contentment to answer three questions about their
congregation: Who are we? Why are we here? Where are we
going? It was raining. The driveway was a sea of mud. The
coffee was perked, the bagels were cut, the people were ready.
For four hours those of you who were lucky enough to be
here talked and laughed and worked at finding the words to
capture your experience here, your love for this place and
these people and the work that we share. And as the answers
began to form, one thing was so abundantly clear: you know

who you are. You know why we are here. It's in the congregation's covenant: "Love is the spirit of this fellowship." People said it in a hundred ways: we care for each other, we can count on each other, and also we care about the world, we want to make the world a better place.

Philip Booth's poem is about trust, about learning to let go and know that you will be carried. This community will carry you.

You are safe here. You can "lie up and survive."

All day yesterday I felt as if I was in the presence of something holy, something sacred. The eight second-draft mission statements that came out of the day's work are, each of them, full of audacious claims. When I officiate at a wedding, I often feel that the promises couples make to each other are so audacious, so radical. How can anyone promise to love anyone forever? These mission statements are like that, and they are true. As true as vows, like deep promises, and also just purely statements of fact.

The vision is clear. The crafting of the third and final draft of the congregation's mission statement is in the works.

This afternoon the facilitators will return to this room and sit with the eight drafts, bring all that they have heard from everyone into the conversation, and meld these eight statements into one. It will not be perfect. It will not be permanent. It will be good enough. It will be useful. “Lie up—and the sea will hold you.”

When the facilitators have finished their work, the final proposed mission statement will be sent to everyone in the congregation by e-mail. It will also be posted on the website. If you need to receive a copy in some other form, please speak to me or to one of the facilitators, and we will accommodate you.

Next Sunday, on March 16, after the service, the members of the congregation will vote to accept the proposed final mission statement. “The cacophony of democracy, the full-throated roar of a free people using their right to freedom of speech,” (Molly Ivins) will prevail. It’s an up or down vote.

The groundwork is being laid this weekend for the answers the last question: If this is who we are, and this is why we are here, then what are we going to do? Each group made a

list of possible actions yesterday, and these will be brought to the Board of Trustees, who are charged to carry the mission forward through a strategic planning process.

The congregation's mission statement provides a benchmark against which we can measure our programs and make our plans. It's a tool. "Ministry is everything the congregation does to fulfill its mission" (Robert Latham, *Moving On from Church Folly Lane*, 246).

The process of creating the mission statement is also a great gift, a gift of respect and affection and intelligence and discernment and laughter. As you opened your hearts to each other yesterday in this room, I was proud of you. I often feel blessed in this ministry we create together, and so today I want to say that I am grateful to be here with you. Grateful and blessed.

Society

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For the Fourth Unitarian

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