

The Closing of the Trost Center
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David S. Moyer

What makes a place sacred or holy?

Well, it begins with creation and the unfolding of the earth and the plants and animals, long before us. And it includes God's declaration that it is "goodvery good." It doesn't need us to be holy.

But then there is the interaction of we humans with a particular piece of ground; our experiences; our work and the picture in the memory of the heart of those we have loved who have been with us in a particular place.

For millennia indigenous people carried on their lives in this and the surrounding space, and then generations of immigrant people farmed and utilized this place. Sacred. Holy.

Ann and I moved just south of here in 1976, now nearly 50 years ago. We moved just in time for a huge ice storm that knocked out power. We slept in our down bags in front of the parsonage fireplace for the first three nights. You can see the church steeple from here.

We started our family on ground that couldn't have been more ideal for young children, there on the edge of town, with cornfields just next to our yard, and the best possible wild playground imaginable-----this very land.

It was accessible via the culvert and the little creek, and though it was somewhat "forbidden" territory without supervision, we knew by the mud on their boots that they snuck over here. The treasures they found! Years later we still had buckets of rocks and spent shotgun shells, this having been a quarry and a favorite place for target shooting, and the spikes that came out of the railroad ties. .

Just last week, a niece in Ohio said, "I remember when Andrew led us on the frozen creek, and he went through. We never told."

The place of childhood delight. Holy. Sacred.

Decisions and interactions can create the sacredness of a space. One remains in my mind for its importance and its humor.:

A meeting of the Conference board in the fellowship hall of Windsor Church where the decision on a capital campaign and the purchase of this land was made. I was on the board, but I was also the nominee in 1988 to be the Northwest Association Minister.

I did not favor building a building. I argued for leasing, so we could have the flexibility to grow or reduce space as demand suggested. Our leader, Dr. Fred Trost was passionate about the building, and we had a friendly clash.

Jim Savides, longtime Northwest Association Minister, as he was leaving, gleefully said to a colleague, "I can't wait to get back to Eau Claire and tell Carole Knight, the chair of the search committee, that her nominee is already fighting with the boss."

I recall William Wensler, the architect coming to a board meeting and everyone was ready to talk about square footage and offices and space needs, but he said, "bring out your hymnals and your prayer books and documents that frame your history." Form may follow function, but both form and function follow history and mission.

Sacred words shaping sacred space..... And Mr. Wensler created the dove with the broken wing design, with the Pentecost, the church birthing image in mind.

Fred's vision was right, and I was wrong. This building went on to drive mission. There would have been no Lay academy, at least not in the incredible form it took, without this building.

I can't tell you of the excitement as people came on Friday night or how many people said to me and to staff, "What else are you offering? We want to come back to this beautiful place." Meals on the patio and walks on the trails and gifted teachers with nature right outside..... Holy.

So many meetings. Can meetings be holy? When you've attended as many as I have in 50 years, you wonder.

But I will remember with almost unbearable tenderness the last part of staff meetings, when it was the Association Minister colleagues and Fred there in the library as the winter sun set and darkness came down, and our passionate conversations about congregations and the mission of the church and our grief at the limits of our capacities and of what we could do, but always with great hope that we might be of some service and the church would find a faithful direction.

We fought, we raised our voices at times, we laughed until tears came, and we understood what it meant to be this delicate and precious and needed setting of the church.....Sacred.

I will resist the temptation to name names, because there are so many from our staff who worked tirelessly and each brought their own unique gifts to the job. I love and appreciate every one of them (of **you**, because some of you are here).

Gratitude fails to be an adequate response, except that they.....they (you) made this space sacred with love and hospitality and care of persons and the church, even if at one time or another, we may have been less kind to one another than Christian love

called for or even when my own personnel decisions may have hurt. We were a team, and the Holy Spirit brought us together and created the holy space where our work could be a blessing and we could be blessed by it.

I recall the sacredness of the most glorious of fall days when a crowd gathered on the hill outside to name this place after Fred Trost, whose vision and leadership gifts built and empowered its mission. The spirit and joy of that day are in no way dimmed as we now need to leave this place as the center of mission.

To have been privileged to sit at a desk and look out over where my children had played and at the beautiful steeple of a church I had served was a blessing so wrapped in the holiness of the Spirit's movement and the sacredness of this odd thing known as "call", that I will always find the richest of blessing.

Now, an important part of the sacredness of space for me and for us all on this day is to know when the Spirit is leading to shape life and ministry in another place. To let go and to say a mission and a call is to be lived out and sacred moments are to be created in a new setting. This too is holy work.

James Russell Lowell, in a poem set to one of my favorite hymn tunes, "Ebenezer" (an irony for this day and space since this was a quarry, and since the Ebenezer is a stone set as the commemoration of a sacred place). The poem says *"New occasions teach new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth. We must onward then and upward, who would keep abreast of truth."*

So, onward.....upward.....trying to keep up with the truth as revealed by the Spirit, a truth that is always always out ahead of us.

Always treasuring this space that was given to us and which we built and used with love.....honoring it as holy.....sacred.....but welcoming new occasions and taking up our new duties as God's guidance and grace allow us to perceive them. Always with hearts full of undying gratitude for this place. Holy. Sacred.