

“HOPE IS NOT A PLAN”

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NOT TO BE MELODRAMATIC – OR TO IN ANYWAY TRIVIALIZE THE DISASTROUS EVENTS OF THE PAST FIVE YEARS – 9/11, THE TSUNAMI IN SRI LANKA, THEN KATRINA, TO NAME JUST THREE – NEW HOPE WAS ORGANIZED IN REACTION TO A DISASTROUS EVENT THAT OCCURRED IN MANY OF OUR LIVES. ALTHOUGH ON SOME DAYS IT FEELS THAT WHAT HAPPENED IN BRIGHTON OCCURRED YEARS AGO – ON OTHER LEVELS IT FEELS LIKE IT HAPPENED YESTERDAY. SUCH ARE THE FEELINGS OF ANYONE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED A TRAUMATIC EVENT. WE HUMANS DO HAVE SOMETHING THAT SAVES US FROM LOSING OUR SANITY WHEN SUCH OVERWHELMINGLY BAD THINGS HAPPEN. IT’S CALLED TIME. AND THERE IS NO ARGUMENT THAT TIME – AND ONLY TIME – CAN EASE THE IMMEDIACY OF THE PAIN WE FEEL WHEN SOMETHING REALLY AWFUL HAS HAPPENED. THE SHARP PAINFUL STING OF LOSS, HURT, AND LONELINESS BEGINS TO SOFTEN AND EVENTUALLY WE DON’T START EACH DAY WITH ANXIOUS FEELINGS. NEW HOPE – THESE PAST MONTHS – HAS GIVEN US SOMETHING TO FOCUS ON AND THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT IT HAS LIVED UP TO ITS NAME – WE REFOCUSED OUR NEGATIVITY INTO SOMETHING POSITIVE AND WELL, HOPEFUL.

ONE OF THE PERKS OF THIS PAST SUMMER WAS THAT I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO A LOT OF READING – AND ONE OF THE BOOKS THAT I ENJOYED IMMENSELY WAS A MEMOIR WRITTEN BY ANDERSON COOPER, THE GOOD LOOKING REPORTER FOR CNN – WHO GAINED NOTORIETY DURING HIS COVERAGE A YEAR AGO OF THE KATRINA DISASTER AND FIASCO. HE HAS BEEN COVERING DISASTERS ALL OVER THE WORLD SINCE GRADUATING FROM YALE IN 1989. AND HE WRITES ABOUT WHAT HE HAS OBSERVED IN HOW PEOPLE BEGIN TO RECOVER FROM DISASTROUS EVENTS AND PERHAPS - SUDDEN ADVERSITY. IN SOME CASES, OF COURSE, AS WHEN WE SPENT TIME IN INDIA AND AFRICA – THERE HE ENCOUNTERED PEOPLE FOR WHOM ADVERSITY AND HOPELESSNESS ARE A WAY OF LIFE. BUT WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WHO ENJOY SOME LEVEL OF COMFORT IN THEIR DAILY LIVES WHEN IT IS COMPLETELY WIPED OUT. AS IN NEW ORLEANS. MR. COOPER WRITES THAT EVERYONE’S REACTION, FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, TO THE MAYOR OF NEW ORLEANS, TO THE PEOPLE STRANDED IN THE SUPERDOME - WAS TO WAIT AND HOPE. HOPE THAT HELP WAS ON ITS WAY - HOPE THAT SOMEONE WAS GOING TO BE IN CHARGE – HOPE THAT SOMEBODY KNEW WHAT TO DO. AS MR. COOPER CONCLUDED “HOPE IS NOT A PLAN.” THAT SENTENCE REALLY STRUCK ME – HOPE IS NOT A PLAN. HOPE – APPARENTLY - IS WHAT WE DO WHEN WE REACT TO CIRCUMSTANCES – NOT WHEN WE ARE BEING PROACTIVE.

AND SO WHILE HOPE WAS APPROPRIATE FOR US WHEN WE WERE INITIALLY REACTING TO A SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES OVER WHICH WE HAD NO CONTROL – IT IS NO LONGER WHAT WILL SUSTAIN US A FAITH COMMUNITY. NOW WE MUST BE INTENTIONAL IN OUR HOPEFULNESS AND MAKE A PLAN. WE MUST APPROACH OUR FUTURE PROACTIVELY AND WITH GOALS. NOT PIE IN THE SKY GOALS – BUT DOABLE AND REACHABLE GOALS. I PERSONALLY HAVE MADE A GOAL TO DOUBLE THE SIZE OF OUR CONGREGATION THIS CHURCH YEAR. WE CURRENTLY HAVE 32 OFFICIAL MEMBERS – I THINK ANOTHER 32 IS A REASONABLE GOAL – AND I HAVE A PLAN TO MAKE THAT GOAL A REALITY. BUT MY PLAN REQUIRES HELP – NOT JUST HOPEFUL GOOD WISHES. SO TODAY, SEPTEMBER 10TH, WE BEGIN, AS A CONGREGATION, OUR STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING OUR GOALS FOR 2006/2007. IT STARTS WITH OUR FIRST CONGREGATIONAL MEETING THAT FOLLOWS THE SERVICE THIS MORNING. WE WILL HAVE TWO AGENDA ITEMS – BOTH ARE CRUCIAL TO OUR BEING PROACTIVE IN BECOMING A CHARTERED UU CONGREGATION. WE NEED BY-LAWS AND WE NEED A BOARD OF TRUSTEES. OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS, CRAIG HEATH, DENNIS STRASSER, MIKE KRUSKIE AND I HAVE WORKED ON PUTTING TOGETHER BY-LAWS FOR NEW HOPE. IF YOU ARE A MEMBER YOU WOULD HAVE RECEIVED THEM IN THE MAIL A FEW WEEKS AGO ALONG WITH THE PROPOSED SLATE OF OFFICERS. I SINCERELY HOPE THAT IF YOU RECEIVED THESE

DOCUMENTS THAT YOU TOOK SOME TIME TO LOOK THEM OVER SO THAT WHEN YOU ARE CALLED ON TO VOTE TODAY, YOU WILL BE MAKING AN INFORMED DECISION. A LOT OF CARE WHEN INTO THE WORDING OF THE BY-LAWS, WE WANTED IT TO BE A DOCUMENT THAT WE COULD REALLY USE AND LIVE WITH. WE ARE ALSO VERY EXCITED ABOUT THE FIVE PEOPLE WHO HAVE SO GENEROUSLY OFFERED TO SERVE ON NEW HOPE'S BOARD FOR THE NEXT YEAR AND HALF. PATRICK SHANNON, PRESIDENT, BRIAN TYLER, VICE PRESIDENT, JOAN FINKEN, TREASURER, HEATHER LAUBE, SECRETARY AND BEV CHAMPAGNE, WHO HAS SERVED AS CHAIR OF THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE SINCE NEW HOPE'S INCEPTION, AS TRUSTEE AT LARGE. ALL OF THE POSITIONS AND THEIR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES ARE COMPLETELY OUTLINED IN THE BY-LAWS. IN THE FUTURE, WHEN A SLATE OF OFFICERS IS PUT TOGETHER BY THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE, EACH PERSON WILL KNOW WHAT OFFICE THEY ARE RUNNING FOR AND EXACTLY WHAT THAT OFFICE WILL REQUIRE OF THEM. BETTER STILL, THE NEW HOPE MEMBERS WILL KNOW WHO THEY ARE VOTING INTO WHAT POSITION. IN CONCLUSION, I WANT YOU EACH TO KNOW THAT I AM DEEPLY COMMITTED TO NEW HOPE. I WILL WORK TIRELESSLY TO HEIGHTEN COMMUNITY AWARENESS THAT THERE IS – RIGHT HERE IN LYON TOWNSHIP - AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL RELIGION – THAT WE NEED NOT ALL WALK THE SAME PATH TO ACHIEVE THE SAME

GOALS. NEW HOPE IS BLESSED WITH A DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – KATHY SILVER, WHO COMES WITH SUCH EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE – THAT OUR RE PROGRAM WILL BE ONE OF THE BEST IN THE DISTRICT. AND DEBBY TYLER ENHANCES OUR SUNDAY SERVICE WITH HER TALENT AND THOUGHTFUL MUSIC SELECTIONS – WITH HER GUIDANCE OUR NEW HOPE CHOIR WILL ALSO BE ONE OF THE BEST IN THE DISTRICT. WE HAVE SO MUCH TO OFFER – WE HAVE SO MUCH TO CONTRIBUTE. IF YOU HAVE BEEN ATTENDING NEW HOPE AND HAVEN'T JOINED – THEN I INVITE YOU TO JOIN ME NEXT SUNDAY AFTER SERVICES FOR A BRIEF MEMBERSHIP ORIENTATION MEETING. LET ME EXPLAIN WHAT MEMBERSHIP IN NEW HOPE MEANS AND WHY WE WANT YOU AS PART OF OUR FAITH FAMILY. TODAY STARTS A NEW ERA IN THE LIFE OF NEW HOPE. TODAY WE BECOME THE PROACTIVE NEW HOPE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION – THE TIME HAS COME. THE TIME IS NOW. SO BE IT.