

Report to the Unity Workers

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Pittsfield, MA

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I wished especially to make this report to the Unity workers because what I have to say has been made possible in a large measure because of the efficiency and the loyalty of the Unity workers to the church in Pittsfield. Anyone who knows the history of Unity Church realizes how important a part the work of the Unity workers has played in its growth. The financial, the moral, and the social contributions made by the women of this church to its common welfare cannot be overestimated. No one, I think, has recognized this fact more clearly than I have.

The best witness of your devotion to the interests of this church was the willingness on your part to discontinue some of the work that you had been doing, and to do this largely on the recommendation of a man. I imagined then, and I think that I was correct in imagining, that it was no little sacrifice on your part for you to think that in the future you would not be able to make such large contributions to the church work. Yet, for reasons that seemed to me to be sufficient, I requested you to make this sacrifice. You were large and generous enough to do it. All I can say is that I heartily thank you.<sup>2</sup>

But I wish to say in addition that I regard it as one of the best contributions you have made to the welfare of the church. At that time [many] were suffering, as many others are now suffering, from the fact that the women were compelled to devote

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<sup>1</sup> This is from the third bound collection that includes sermons from 1908, along with a couple of reports, such as this one. So, while not explicitly dated, it is very likely from 1908.

<sup>2</sup> This very likely refers to an action Davis took in 1907. Then, as the-relatively-new minister of the Unity Church, Davis stopped the practice of the women workers of the church holding church fairs and fund-raisers for the church. Davis gave up a significant portion of his salary—\$300—in consequence. But he felt that the practice was not treating people according to their need. This got some press. See the *Boston Herald* for January 20, 1907.

so much time to work for the maintenance of the church finances, that we were constantly menaced by the possibility of that work's overshadowing the greater and essential work of the church. We were in a situation somewhat similar to the woman who works hard all day at cleaning so that she may enjoy the clean house in the evening. But when the evening comes she is so tired that she is beyond enjoyment. We were working hard here to maintain a house in which to worship the living God, but it sometimes seemed as if when the time came to do the real thing for which all the rest was but a preparation, we were too exhausted, and worn out to do that last thing without which all the rest of the work was worthless. This condition is discouragingly common in all churches. Here I wish to make the general statement, which was in the background of my mind, when I made that strange request of you. The churches spend so much time in preparing the temple and its accessories for its true work that they have no time left for the search after truth, for the worship of God, for which the church exists. This is a part, and indeed, a larger part, of the reason why the Christian church today has lost its grip on the moral problems and the spiritual welfare of the American people. The condition in this church was the result of circumstances rather than the loss of vision. But there is danger that in time, circumstances may impair the vision.

But your faith in a moral truth has not been in vain. The way is before you, I think, when, for a time at least, and forever, if we are true to our opportunity, you may feel less of the heavy burden of maintaining a plant, and may the more freely devote yourself to the true and the real work of the church. Certain people who recognize your pluck and your devotion have generously said that you shall be freed from the responsibility of providing the equipment, and shall have your time to devote to the larger work of the church. This working capital, which will be sufficient to enable you to work with comparative freedom, is given you on the sole condition that it is used. In accepting it we place ourselves under a moral responsibility to do such work as our freedom demands.

With a comparatively free hand, then, we address ourselves to the work of the current year. You have asked me to suggest to you what that work shall be. I will do so as briefly as possible.

I--To begin with, it is hardly necessary to say that in a church we come together upon an entirely different basis than in any other organization. The church is not a social club, it is not [a] merchants' association, but it is a group of people who come together upon the ground of common moral and spiritual interests. In proportion as we come to know each other, from this point of view, well, our efficiency in the church work, and our sense of the worth of the church to us, appear. For the purpose of recognizing this need and meeting its demand in the church, you have been having occasional parish suppers and socials. These seem to me to be of the highest importance from the point of view of which we have been speaking. As the first answer to your question, I would suggest that you arrange to have social suppers of this kind once each month. The question as to the price of admission, and what you shall do with the money which comes from the admission fee does not disturb me provided you do not lose sight of the fact [that] the social element must not be sacrificed in the interests of revenue.

Furthermore, I would suggest that you, during the summer months, arrange for the dates on which these suppers are to come, and appoint the committee to arrange for each supper, and have the dates and the homes of the committee printed on your program for the year's activities. This will avoid confusion and uncertainties.

II--At your sewing meetings I would suggest that you divide your time between sewing for your own interests, and sewing for the house of Mercy, the Children's Day Nursery, or the District Nursing Association. It is for such work as this that you should give your best time and efforts.

I would also suggest that you have the dates of these sewing meetings be printed on your programs, together with a committee of one or two who shall be responsible for the meetings.

III--The work of the women's organization would never be complete unless a good share of your time were devoted to study of one kind or another. It would be advisable, I think, for you to place even more emphasis that you have heretofore upon this aspect of your work. We are in the midst of the most marvelous changes that the world has ever witnessed. To understand the life in which we are living and to be able to appreciate its significance, is particularly the duty of women connected with a

free church. I suggest for your consideration the advisability of your extending the work that you have been doing in the alliance. It has occurred to me that you would do well to consider the possibility of forming a study class for the purpose of following a definite line of work throughout the next year.

I would be glad to render you any service that I can in this direction. Please be free to ask anything of me.

In connection with this line of work, I would also make another suggestion, which at first may seem to you to be exceedingly silly and foolish. But I am convinced that it is very far from being either silly or foolish. I suggest that each one of the Unity Workers secure a copy of Dr. Savages' *Living By The Day*.<sup>3</sup> And I further suggest that you make it your daily practice to read the daily passage each morning, before you begin on your day's work. Possibly, you may say that you have not the time to do that. Very well, take the time and soon you will find that you cannot afford to do your work without it. Even if you don't see the sense of this, I beg and urge you to try it faithfully for one year.

IV—Thus far the things that I have suggested are entirely centered in ourselves, and are things that are easily accomplished. But they are only the preparation for that wider work which every person connected with this church or any other church should be anxious to do. What I have in mind is suggested by such work as the Post Office Mission is doing. There are hundreds of women in this city who need the friendship of such as you are, and indeed whose friendship you need. To carry the power of a cheerful heart to anyone who is carrying a burden, or is lonely, or does not understand the meaning of life, that is a real work. I cannot tell you how to do this work, but I can tell you this, you really want to do it, the opportunity will not be wanting.

I can only make one practical suggestion along this line. I suggest that you appoint a committee, whose duty it shall be to call upon people who may be ill, or strangers in the city, or

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<sup>3</sup> Minot Judson Savage (1841-1918) Unitarian minister, *Living by the Day: Selections from the Writings of Minot J. Savage*, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1901.

upon any others. It would be advisable to have cards printed somewhat as follows, "Ladies of the Unity Church," or "Committee of the Unity Church Alliance." Let this committee be at the church service for the purpose of doing similar work there. Should you see fit to do such work as this, I will be only glad to make more concrete suggestions along this line.

V—I have suggested to you such lines of work as seem to me to be desirable and well within the limits of our possibilities. You are much more free at present to do this work than you ever have been. The things which I have suggested are such as seem to me the natural and proper things to be done; such as will be of value to you as individuals and such as affords the natural and the proper channel for you to leave upon the community, the moral and spiritual contribution that you desire to make to the common good.

Just one thing more that I wish to say. It so happens that this church faces more directly than any other in this city, the one great problem of the churches as a whole. In a way that is uncomfortably searching, the church is being questioned as to its right to exist. Its right to exist can be maintained, only as it ministers through its members to the deeper and more far-reaching needs of the human soul. There are now, and there always have been, hungerings after righteousness. One is the sacramental method, as exemplified in the Catholic church in its complete form, and in all other fellowships including our own to a greater or less degree. The sacramental form relies on ritual for stirring the emotions and upon the mediating influence of the priesthood. It has its charm and its attractions. But as Jesus said in his strong denunciation of it in his address to the Pharisees, it does not get to the heart of things. It glosses over the outside, it appeals to the sentiments, but it does not reach the heart and the soul. The second method is the method of the open soul, the personal appeal, the subtle and pervasive influence of one personality upon another. This was the method of Jesus. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."<sup>4</sup> It is to this method that you are committed by your very nature. It is this method that the world is asking for. It is this method that you have to give and that you will give. In the giving of it, you will at the same time bring to yourselves peace and power, and make your

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 11:28.

richest and most lasting contribution to this dear little Unity Church which you have made into the symbol of a free consecrated devotion to life's purest ideals.