

## ITS DEDICATION

### Services in the New Fourth Universalist Church

Sermons by the Rev. Dr. Almon Gunnison and the Rev. Abram Conklin—  
Congratulatory Letters from Neighboring Pastors of Other Denominations

Regular services in connection with the dedication of the Fourth Universalist Church were held yesterday morning, afternoon and evening in the new edifice on Quincy street, near Reid avenue. In the morning there was a service by the Sunday school and an address by the pastor, the Rev. Abram Conklin. Twenty-four children were baptized. The dedication service began at 2:30 P.M., and at that hour the church was crowded, many standing in the aisles and at the doorways. On the platform sat the Rev. Abram Conklin, the Rev. Dr. Almon Gunnison; pastor of All Souls' Church; the Rev. Dr. A. J. Canfield, of the Church of Our Father; the Rev. Dr. C.[Cyrus] H. Fay and Rev. Dr. Mason, of Buffalo. The music, especially arranged for the occasion, was by the choir of All Souls' Church. The exercises began with an organ voluntary and then the choir sang an anthem. Dr. Mason invoked the blessing and the choir again sang. The Rev. Dr. Gunnison preached the dedicatory sermon, taking his text from I Kings, ix:3: "And the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication that thou hast made before me; I have hallowed this house which thou has built to put my name there forever and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." Dr. Gunnison said [in part]:

"....This church, like that temple of Jerusalem, like every church ever built, is significant in that it represents the vitality of the religious instinct; that the souls of men [sic] are still susceptible to the inspirations of high ideas; that the hidden springs which feed life are still open. Every church that rises in the world bears witness that the soul still keeps its vision and so long as there is vitality at the head of things, no matter into what extravagance of expression it may run, this can be changed... This building, too, is not simply a church; it is a Christian church. It is more of the expression of the religious instinct. It is religion set to a life. This church stands for the particular interpretation of Christianity, for it is the glory of Christianity that it reveals itself differently to different minds.... This church we dedicate as a Universalist Christian Church. Not a brick has been laid upon its walls in hostility to any church of any name. There are varieties of administration. The body of Christ, which is the church, is a thing of many members, and the hand cannot say to the foot, I have no need of you. So be it. This church is the church historic, founded on the apostles and prophets, a triumphant Christ the chief cornerstone. It is a church of the martyrs who suffered as seeing a vision that is invisible; a church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. The church is the church actual, full of incentives of present duty, teaching that there is no other way in which the soul can walk than the way of righteousness; that time and eternity are pledged to bring the soul to obedience and that great peace is theirs who keep the law of the spirit. And so we come to-day to offer this church unto the Lord, for the glory of His name and the service of His kingdom."

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When Dr. Gunnison concluded, the choir sang, and then the Rev. Dr. Fay offered the dedicatory prayer. Mr. M. M. Wagner, of the trustees, reported that the church property had cost \$15,000, upon which was a mortgage of only \$4,000. He said there was a floating debt on the church amounting to \$1,500, \$500 of that had been collected a few nights ago, leaving a balance of \$1,000 to be paid. He hoped that every one would give liberally. Rev. Mr. Conklin made an effective appeal for funds to wipe out this indebtedness. Nearly the entire amount desired was raised. Addresses were made by the Rev. Dr. Canfield, the Rev. Dr. Fay, the Rev. Dr. Mason, and the pastor pronounced the benediction.

Special services were held in the evening, and after the usual exercise the Rev. Abram Conklin preached the sermon, taking for his text I Timothy, chapter iii:15: "The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." He said:

"The church of to-day differs in many particulars from the church of the old apostolic times. The modern church may have lost something of the fidelity, simplicity and earnestness that marked the earlier followers of the Master. It has certainly grown in charm and sweet attraction. The pillar of truth has come to be entwined with graceful vines, the ground of truth has been enriched with many flowers. The religious and heroic features of the church are associated with many of our most pleasant experiences and are blended with our best enjoyments. Arts, science, society and literature have lent their aid to make it beautiful. It would have bewildered one of the old apostles to have reached over the span of 1,800 years and looked in upon a modern church service. I think he would be gratified and pleased. A Nineteenth Century church is a social organization. If man [sic] is a social creature and requires companionship, why should not these instincts be directed in conformity to his higher nature? The church has frowned on geniality and laughter. The time has come to welcome true, refined enjoyment. We want music in the church; we want flowers there. The Nineteenth Century church simplifies its creed and multiplies its missions. It sacrifices theory to justice. It has shorter prayers and greater charities. It has less theology and more love. The sermons of fifty years ago were speculative and argumentative. To-day the best sermons are short and practical. The old sermons put men to sleep; the new ones rouse them to action. The flowery language, the sentimental illustrations, the elaborate statement of abstract questions which once won admiration, the modern age scarcely tolerates. The Nineteenth Century church is a church of good tidings. It awakens by its message all that is sweet and holy in the human soul. It is a church that lays hold on the principles of righteousness as they have ever been manifest in the saintly and the pure. It is a church of confidence in the divine realities, in the glory of God and heaven. It is the life of Jesus communicating itself to the world. The church will not perish. It has too large and important place to fill to suffer from the attacks of its enemies. The church is called the body of Christ. You are the heart and hands of Jesus. The church is the larger Christ... I urge the claim that the church is intended to be and may be the true

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body of Christ, his great representative upon the earth, and that the Nineteenth Century church in its liberty, its reasonableness, its enlightened and practical zeal, is approaching the true ideal nearer than it ever did before."

The new church is a handsome Gothic structure, with a frontage of fifty feet on Quincy street and sixty-five feet deep. It has a seating capacity of 500. The location is favorable to such an organization and there is every promise that the present edifice will soon be too small for the congregation. The best of feeling exists between this society and the neighboring churches. Letters of congratulation were sent to Mr. Conklin yesterday by Rev. S. Giffard Nelson, of the Trinity Baptist Church, and Rev. Mr. Hultz, of the Bushwick Reformed Church. In 1884 a few families of the liberal faith came together and discussed the advisability of starting a new Universalist society. In February, 1885 the organization was effected and regular services were held in Ridgewood Hall, with the Rev. Abram Conklin as its efficient pastor. Under his ministrations the number of families has increased to nearly one hundred and the Sunday school to over two hundred. In the Winter of 1886 the owner of Ridgewood Hall gave notice that a portion of the building was to be rented as a saloon. Mr. Conklin's society and the temperance organizations which held meetings in the hall began a warfare which resulted in the Excise Commissioners refusing to grant a license to the proposed saloon. It was a victory for the church, but notice was served that it could no longer be used. An indignation meeting was held in the Trinity Baptist Church, addressed by the clergy of all denominations. Offers of sympathy and money were made and the new society began the project of the new church edifice which was dedicated yesterday. Rev. Mr. Conklin has had the earnest support of the following Board of Trustees: M.M. Wagner, S.R. Abrams, W.F.R. Mills, M.M. Cannon, H. Muller, G.D.T. Rouse, D.M. Holbrook. Among those originating this movement may be mentioned S.F. Harker, W.R. Slocum, C. Brewster, C.M. Shober, H.E. Jackson, A.O. Atwood, G.E. Shattuck, A. Harrison, A.R. Heath, Dr. H. Shattuck, J.M. McCallum, T.J. Phillips, W.F. Palmer, C.W. Reeve, A.T. Stephens, James Sutton, Charles Spencer, G.W. Tucker, P.F. Van Everen.

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Transcribed on 18 Aug 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY