

ALWAYS ON (THE) EDGE

175th Anniversary Address

Jacksonville, Illinois, Congregational United Church of Christ

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The Jacksonville Congregational United Church of Christ has reached the ripe old age of one hundred and seventy-five. What a wonderful achievement! I congratulate you, and am honored to be your anniversary speaker. This is a time to celebrate the past, face squarely today's challenges, and move into the future with hope.

I'm not always sure, however, that living to a ripe old age is an achievement. When I marked my eightieth birthday this past March, a friend asked, "How does it feel to attain eighty?" Attain is not a verb I would have chosen. It startled and puzzled me. Sensing my hesitation, he tried to reassure me with these words, "You certainly look the same, and seem about the same." I wanted to ask him, "The same as what?" But decency forbade. I thanked him for his kindness and let it go at that. But I did wonder, does one attain age, or does one merely persist into it? In many ways I feel as I did when I was eight, or eighteen, or twenty-eight, or any of the other "eights," that is, until I try to do something. Then my arthritic joints, diminished sight and hearing, slipping memory, or lack of energy remind me of more losses than I care to contemplate.

How does that question work for a church? Does an awareness of being one hundred and seventy-five make you feel that you have achieved something, or that you've persisted, still looking pretty good but mindful of growing deficits? I hope you celebrate your past joyfully but not nostalgically. Nostalgia is a wonderful place to visit, but no place to stay.

Speaking of nostalgia, I must add a further personal word before addressing my topic. You have taken a great risk by inviting a speaker who once was a member of the Jacksonville church and lived in this community. Reminiscing is great fun for the "reminiscer," but soon wears thin for the listener. So I will say only this much: we moved to Jacksonville in August of 1956 where I began my first full-time ministry as chaplain

and assistant professor of religion at Illinois College. At first we lived at 710 West Beecher, across the street from Bea and Harris Pankhurst. Harris then was the minister at the Jacksonville Congregational Church. The Pankhursts rounded up furniture and food for us when our moving van did not come for several weeks. We joined the Jacksonville Church. I sang in the choir under the direction of Professor Joseph Cleeland, and served on church boards and committees. Our second son, David, was born at Passavant Hospital and baptized in this church. We left Jacksonville to move to Chicago in 1962 so that I could finish my dissertation. Sometimes I still dream, at night, that I have returned to a teaching position at Illinois College, but in the same dream I wonder if this was the right thing to do and wonder whether it will work. So you see how deeply Jacksonville is embedded in my soul.

Introduction.

I chose “Always on (the) Edge” as my topic for this address because I think it says something about the Jacksonville Church, and this kind of church, as we celebrate its historic anniversary and at the same time face a worrisome future. The parentheses around the word, the, are meant to suggest the double meaning of that word, edge. An edge can be a promising transition requiring the courage to risk much. An edge can also be precipice from which we might fall to our death. We used to think it was good to be on the cutting edge, suggesting a daring but risky exploration of new terrain. Nowadays we speak of a movie or song or play or piece of music or work of art as “edgy,” meaning that we are disturbed by it but, at the same time, we are taken to a new place of deepened sensibility. And those same parentheses suggest that being always **on the edge** is also always being **on edge**, anxious, hopeful, but also feeling unsettled and insecure. By calling this address, “Always on (the) Edge,” I mean to invoke all those meanings of edge and edgy as I speak of the heritage of the Jacksonville Church and its challenges as it confronts its worrisome future.

I want to speak briefly of five edges where the Jacksonville Church has teetered and then, at the end, the edge where your church and mine, and many others, are precariously balanced today. The five historic edges for the Jacksonville Church are the

Plan of Union, the abolition of slavery, the rise of the Social Gospel, affirming church union, and embracing a liberation social agenda. Following my brief comments on each of these five edges, I will conclude with a more extensive exploration of the current edge, where an old-line church and denomination face either wasting away or a vigorous rebirth with a sharpened identity and mission in post-modernity.

On the Edge of the Plan of Union

The first edge facing the Jacksonville Church at its founding in 1833 was its relation to the Plan of Union. If you are not an American church historian, and particularly an historian of the Congregational and Presbyterian denominations in the nineteenth century, you may never have heard of the Plan of Union. The Plan was a formal agreement between the Connecticut General Association of Congregational Churches and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church to engage in joint missionary church planting on the western frontier, which then included Illinois. The Plan of Union was formally adopted by both bodies in 1801.¹ The Plan authorized the establishment of new churches of mixed Congregationalist and Presbyterian membership, churches that could be served by ministers of either denomination. The denomination of the minister would determine whether the new church would become Presbyterian or Congregationalist. But in practice, since all churches were required by Presbyterian polity to have representatives to the presbytery, a regional governing body which is the basic unit of the church in that polity, many of those mission churches became de facto Presbyterian, regardless of the proportion of its members or the denomination of its minister. The Plan of Union permitted Congregationalist associations to be organized, but few actually were.

Those who founded the Jacksonville Independent Church in 1833 were restless with the Presbyterian system, and did not see that the premise of the Plan of Union, that frontier churches would fare better in a Presbyterian rather than Congregational polity, was actually borne out in their experience. New England transplants saw no reason why

¹ The full text of the Plan of Union can be accessed at www.americanpresbyterianchurch.org/the_plan_of_union.htm.

the New England system of independent churches voluntarily associating could not work as well on the frontier. While the missionary pastors and teachers of the Yale Band, most notably Julian Sturtevant, but also William Carter, the first Jacksonville pastor, and Edward Beecher, president of Illinois College, rendered faithful service to the Jacksonville Church in its infancy, they still remained committed to the Plan of Union. They were native New Englanders and thus Congregationalists, but also supporting the Plan of Union. That loyalty began to erode, however, when Beecher and Sturtevant were tried for heresy by the presbytery, and when Old School and New School Presbyterian divisions over the revivals and doctrine emerged. And then divisions between pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions in the Presbyterian Church further tested the Plan of Union, as well as testing the whole Presbyterian denomination.

Thus, from its very beginning, the Jacksonville Church moved out to the edge of the Plan of Union, and into the cutting edge of the establishment of Congregationalism in the state of Illinois. While later in the century the weight of Congregationalism's numbers shifted from south-central Illinois to the northern counties and then to Chicago, the founding role of the Jacksonville Church, always on the edge, cannot be denied, should not be overlooked, and should always be celebrated.

On the Edge of Abolition

Early in its life the Jacksonville Independent and then Congregational Church became known as the abolitionist church in the town and region. This was the second edge on which the Jacksonville Church teetered. In hindsight the abolition of slavery would seem the only properly moral course to take. At that time, however, it was not so obvious. Many of the white settlers in the Jacksonville area came from parts of Kentucky and Indiana where slavery was more favorably regarded. Professors and students at Illinois College, openly abolitionist, were treated with suspicion and anger in the community, causing anxiety about the safety of persons and property. The martyrdom of Elijah Lovejoy in Alton in 1837 warranted such fears. Lovejoy published an abolitionist newspaper. His views aroused sufficient outrage to precipitate a mob action destroying the press and assassinating the publisher. Elihu Wolcott, one of the Jacksonville church's

founding members, was also the first president of the Illinois State Anti-Slavery Society. Wolcott and other members of the Jacksonville Church assisted escaped slaves to gain legal rights or to travel farther in what became known as the Underground Railroad. And members of the Jacksonville Church taught Sunday school classes for African-American children at a time when many believed such children were uneducable.

On the edge of respectability; on the edge of community hostility; on the edge of a future no one could foresee, the Jacksonville Church staked out its moral witness on the abolition of slavery. On this occasion of celebrating the church's 175th anniversary, we look back on those courageous ancestors with gratitude and awe, praying that we, as their successors in this church, can follow their example in our time, especially in this time of resurgent covert racism hovering around the presidential campaign, and that we may not succumb to the desire for respectability.

On the Edge of the Social Gospel

A third edge for the Jacksonville Church, and other Congregational Churches at the turn of the century, was the boundary separating personal morality from social justice issues related to the industrialization of the United States. Today we speak of systemic justice along with personal justice, though I do not believe the word, systemic, was used in that way at that time. Congregational churches, and other churches in the Free Church and Reformed heritage, were steadily committed to working for a just and righteous social order. Late nineteenth Congregationalist preaching and teaching stressed personal moral values like honesty, thrift, hard work, loyalty, and fair play. Churches like the Jacksonville Church, following the American Civil War, directed their moral teachings and energies to assisting the freed African American slaves, opposing alcoholic beverages, and supporting what we call today family values. These Victorian virtues of the time were increasingly challenged, however, as the United States moved from an agrarian to an industrial economy, with the growth of cities and factories, and new immigrant populations from eastern and southern Europe increasingly living in city slums. Against the view that righteous Christian industrialists could be counted on to be fair and just in their treatment of workers and their families, Social Gospel writers like

Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch argued that the Older Testament prophets and the teachings of Jesus offered a fundamental critique of the capitalist-industrial economic and social system, a critique that called for social reforms such as the rights of workers to organize unions, contract with their employers for better pay and improved working conditions, to go out on strike if negotiations broke down, and a critique that also called for increasing legal restraints on the power of the “robber barons” of the railroad and oil industries. It sounds eerily familiar, does it not?

I cannot tell from the records at my disposal whether the Jacksonville Congregational Church welcomed the preaching of the Social Gospel, or whether one or more of its ministers around the turn of the century were Social Gospel preachers. It would not be surprising if they were, given the history of this church in its advocacy of a free polity and its staunch defense of the abolition of slavery. It would be surprising if the Jacksonville church had not been affected by the Social Gospel influences spreading through Illinois and the Midwest from Chicago Theological Seminary, where President Graham Taylor and members of the faculty developed a social ethics approach to seminary education. And Hermann R. Muelder says, “There is no question that after the middle nineties a very large number of the Congregational ministers in Illinois were deeply and honestly concerned with the ethical implications of the new economic order.”² I trust that was so here in Jacksonville.

On the Ecumenical Edge

A fourth edge on which the Jacksonville Congregational Church turned was its decision to join the United Church of Christ, representing a union between the Congregational and Christian denomination and the Evangelical and Reformed Church. This union was first broached in the late nineteen-thirties, postponed during the years of World War II, and then revived afterward, culminating in the Uniting General Synod in Cleveland in 1957, which I had the good fortune to attend.

² Hermann R. Muelder, “The Period of Growth, 1865-1900” in *A History of Illinois Congregational and Christian Churches*, ed. Matthew Spinka (Chicago: Congregational and Christian Conference of Illinois, 1944), 204.

It would not have been surprising if the Jacksonville Church had hesitated about joining the new denomination. Many of the old-line historically New England-based congregations feared joining with the Evangelical and Reformed Church where a national General Synod and regional synods seemed to threaten local church autonomy. But it was not only a fear of losing independence. There were cultural factors at work as well. The Evangelical and Reformed Church was German in its cultural heritage, not an appealing heritage during and following World War II. Its polity was more like that of the Presbyterians. And it employed its confessional heritage—the Augsburg Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Evangelical Catechism—as teaching and preaching norms in a way that puzzled and alarmed some Congregationalists. And, sad to say, there were social class distinctions that no one really discussed openly, but which affected feelings about such a union. The Evangelical and Reformed Church was a more blue-collar denomination, while Congregationalists tended to be of the learned, professional, and propertied classes. Consequently some influential Congregational clergy and laity became part of anti-merger organizations. There was even a court case challenging the union, the resolution of which held the union hostage for several years.

In spite of all that, the ecumenical zeal of those years, in much of Protestantism and across the world, sustained those laboring for the union with the conviction that it was time to come together and manifest more fully the unity for which Christ prayed. The religious landscape is so profoundly different these days that I have found, in my teaching, that it is difficult to convey a sense of how deeply that ecumenical passion was felt back then.

The formal vote of the Jacksonville Congregational Church to approve the Constitution of the United Church of Christ came after I had left Jacksonville, and without access to the church's minutes and the memories of those still living I can only speculate on how that decision was made. Perhaps some of you can inform me about that. However it happened, that affirmative vote launched the Jacksonville Congregational Church into a new ecclesial reality in which the edges of risk and promise were not clearly defined, a unity that is still being shaped and refined in national and regional settings of the United Church of Christ. It would have been easier to stay in the familiar landscape of good old New England Congregationalism. But the Jacksonville Church,

always on the edge, took the plunge into a new church in a new time, and that decision has made a huge difference in its destiny.

On the Edge of Radical Justice and Social Respectability

The fifth and last of my “on the edge” observations about the history of the Jacksonville Church concerns its decisions to become a Just Peace Church and an Opening and Affirming congregation. Again I must say that without access to documents or memories, I can only imagine how those decisions were made. In my church in Minneapolis, First Congregational UCC of Minnesota, the Just Peace decision was easier to make and more quickly forgotten, or simply taken for granted. The Open and Affirming process took two years of study, many meetings, arriving at a decisively affirmative vote but resulting in the departure of several members. That painful loss has been more than offset by gaining many new members who are either GLBT in orientation or new members who support that cause.

The Jacksonville Church, like the United Church of Christ, has moved to the edge of social respectability by its advocacy for just peace and for persons of diverse sexual orientations. As the current political campaigns have demonstrated, our nation has moved in recent years closer to supporting full legal rights for LGBT persons, but except for states like Massachusetts, California, and now Connecticut, our nation seems not yet ready to support the UCC stance on equality of marriage, as voted by the UCC General Synod in its Atlanta meeting in 2005. The prophet’s call for justice and compassion breaks through old barriers, but with the cost of either hostile opposition or, more painful yet, simply being ignored, relegated to the sideline rather than the mainline.

On the Edge of Post Modernity

My brief observations about these five cutting edges where the Jacksonville Church has taken its stand—the Plan of Union, the abolition of slavery, the Social

Gospel, wider Christian union, and now its stance as a Just Peace and Open and Affirming congregation—bring me to my concluding observations on that new place where your church and mine teeters: the fate and calling of an old-line congregation and denomination, in this new time of post-modernity. We are truly on the edge, and, as a result, on edge.

I realize that the phrase, post-modernity, is a catch-all phrase for changes we dimly sense but do not fully grasp. At least it means no longer modern. (Parenthetically, I must say I am astonished with the literature of post-modernity I have read, in philosophy, the social sciences, or the humanities, because of its supremely self-confident tone coupled with its densely opaque vocabulary, a vocabulary I can scarcely fathom but which writers feel obliged to use.) By post-modernity in these remarks, I mean the fact that a local congregation like the Jacksonville Church or a mainline denomination like the United Church of Christ can no longer depend on its cultural context for its definition. In the passing age of modernity we knew what churches were and what they were for. In post-modernity nobody knows and not many care. Or more precisely, for those who pay any attention, “church” means incredible beliefs and hateful practices imposed in ways that hurt people, betray trust, make love impossible, and forbid joy of any kind, especially sensual pleasure. Recent books and articles praising atheism as the only truly moral position, books that suggest that religious belief is inherently violent in its intention and outcome, add fuel to the fire of an anti-Christian rhetoric that takes no account of the varieties of Christian belief and practice. It does not help, I think, to attack these caricatures head-on, to say, “We’re not like that at all. Come and see how gentle and loving and welcoming we are!”

It may help, however, for our kind of church to engage in more disciplined acts of self-definition that will not start with the premise that everyone knows what a church is, but with the premise that no one knows, that it is a blank slate, and it is our responsibility, in word and deed, to fill in those blanks. In a moment I will offer some suggestions about how to do that, but before making those suggestions, I want to survey current efforts to acknowledge the gravity of this situation and to do something about it.

One such effort is the United Church of Christ Congregational Vitality Initiative. This is a national program, also situated in Conferences, with staff services along with

print and electronic resources to assist congregations to become revitalized. I hope your Conference, your Association, and your staff have put you in touch with these resources. And I hope that you will look it up on the UCC website if you are unfamiliar with this program. The Church Vitality Initiative has identified six signs of a vital congregation: visionary leadership, life together, nurturing faith, extravagant welcome, hope-filled worship, and bold local and global witness. I am confident these are valuable benchmarks. But I am a bit hesitant about the suggestion that working to improve such vital signs, without a substantial foundation in a deepening faith, will last long or matter very much in the end. Perhaps depth of faith can follow upon vitality, but I wonder. Will learning how to shout and dance breed faith, or simply fatigue?

Secondly let me comment on the Emergent Church and the Mega Church as promising institutional forms in post-modernity, succeeding in ways that cannot be imagined in traditional denominational churches. Each has something to teach us about being a faithful denominational church in post-modernity. From the Emergent Church we can learn about ancient practices of prayer and contemporary celebrations with the arts and music of the people, "all the people," as we say in the UCC, not just the cultural elites. From the Mega Church we can learn about the vital importance of a practical hospitality that welcomes the seeker, of respecting the felt needs of all participants, and providing programs and services that meet those needs. Too often a traditional church message seems to say, "We know what you need; we already have it; now take it for your own good!" It may seem like a dose of castor oil. But we should be wary about aspects of these successful new church movements. Emergent Churches are typically lay-led, home-based, and institutionally low-profile. If they succeed and grow, they will need to hire professional staff, create boards and committees of oversight, rent or own physical facilities, and establish formal ties with the wider church. They can deliberately choose not to go that route, but success breed bureaucratization, in spite of trying to avoid it. What then? It's a new denomination, one that will have to decide what to call itself, what traditions to honor and how it is defined, and all the rest. Mega Churches are easy targets for caricature, looking like bloated consumer-driven shopping malls. Mega Churches are also staff-driven, creating a culture of dependence on charismatic preachers, musicians, and youth leaders. But those are not the main traps of the Mega Church. That would be,

in my view, its lack of denominational roots, indeed its sometimes deliberate disavowal of any denominational ties, while at the same time preaching and teaching a soft conservatism in biblical interpretation and on moral issues. That may seem a safe route, unlikely to offend anyone. But it is offensive to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am not, in these remarks, defending modern denominationalism, especially its historic penchant for finding fault with every other denomination than one's own. But any worthy church renewal must honor not just the biblical and ancient traditions, but those of lasting value from the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and from modernity. Otherwise we flounder untethered.

Thirdly I want to mention important writers who hold out some hope for mainline churches, specifically Diana Butler Bass³ and Anthony Robinson⁴, as well as those like Jim Wallis and Hal Taussig⁵ seeking renewal under the banner of Progressive Christianity, though Taussig, at least, does not see much hope for renewing existing denominational churches. Bass emphasizes a renewed focus on Christian practices, preferring that word, practices, over beliefs and actions, a traditional vocabulary for the Christian life. Practices include disciplines of private and corporate prayer, biblical and theological study, action for compassion and justice in society, both individually and corporately. Anthony Robinson calls for a theological renewal in the mainline congregation, certainly a worthy goal. And the Progressive Christian movement defines itself as clearly Christian, affirming gender equality and feminism, welcoming persons of GLBT orientation, working for social justice, and not thinking of Christian identity as better than other religious traditions. My only hesitation about all these positive objectives is my sense that, like the current mantra in the United Church of Christ—peace with justice, open and affirming, multiracial and multicultural, anti-racist, and accessible to all—these goals should describe who we are but not define the ends toward which we labor. We should, in my view, be laboring to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ, in whom all these qualities are embodied. I can illustrate my hesitation one other way: In the United Church of Christ, in every setting, we work to increase diversity. But what kinds

³ Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a new Old Church* (Washington, D.C., The Alban Institute, 2004).

⁴ Anthony Robinson, *What's Theology Got to Do With It?* (Washington, D.C., The Alban Institute, 2005).

⁵ Hal Taussig, "Grassroots Progressive Christianity, a Quiet Revolution," from the website of St. David's Uniting Church, Canterbury, Victoria, Australia.

of diversity matter the most, or are they all equal? And how can we tell if we ever achieve sufficient diversity? In my view, diversity should be a result of our new life as followers of Jesus Christ. But as it is, diversity is an impossible objective with which we condemn one another, and ourselves for not being sufficiently diverse, resulting in a perpetually striving but never joyful religious life.

I conclude with two suggestions for you at the Jacksonville Church, and other churches like it. These are ways I can imagine turning from falling off the edge to claiming a new edge, a cutting edge of renewal and revival. First we need to consciously and in a disciplined way reclaim our identity as followers of Jesus Christ. We resist doing that for two reasons: 1) we do not want to be taken for Christian exclusivists, those who insist that the only true way to God is through Jesus Christ, and that other religions and philosophies are incomplete until they make a place for Jesus Christ. And 2) we do not want to lose our welcoming embrace of diverse religious and ethical traditions, by which we assure ourselves that we are really liberal and progressive. And if you add to those powerful inner resistances the lingering assumption from modernity, which I mentioned earlier, that everyone knows what a church is for, and that our kind of church is the best kind, and why can't people realize that and come streaming through our doors. No, in this new age of post-modernity, we are going to have to decide who we are, how we will say who we are, and how we will live in keeping with that identity as followers of Jesus Christ.

If we are to survive and thrive in this new post-modern time, every local church will need to engage in an active discipline of fresh self-definition. Nothing can be taken for granted, nothing assumed. I'm not talking about long-range or strategic planning. We do too much of that and not enough soul searching. I do not have a precise formula for refreshing a church's self-definition, but I do believe it must occur in a context of prayer, bible study and a wider theological and religious study, in personal confession and testimony, and honest confrontation. It will require visionary leaders, as the UCC Church Vitality Initiative states. Such leaders are not always the formally educated and certified clergy, but are found in every congregation, if we look for them.

The process needs to focus on the meaning of being avowedly Christian in an undefined age. I have come to believe that the verb, to follow, is a better way to speak

about those who follow Jesus Christ, rather than verbs like confessing, professing, assenting, agreeing, attesting, or other verbs traditionally used. To follow, and to be a follower, seems more whole and integrated, favoring neither belief nor action, but including both. And to follow Jesus Christ allows one to locate oneself in two narratives—the narrative of Jesus as the prophetic wisdom teacher, an image proposed by scholars from the Jesus Seminar, dear to liberal and progressive Christians, and at the same time to locate oneself inside the Christ narrative, from creative and prophetic Word to Incarnate Word, through the crucified and risen Christ, and the promised reign and return in the fulfillment of all things. Claiming and entering this Christ narrative may be a real stretch for liberal and progressive Christians, who might detect Christian exclusivism. But if we can't find a way to join the Christ narrative as well as the Jesus narrative, we risk losing our historical bearings. Whether you follow my suggested shift in vocabulary and its significance, I believe our churches must, first and foremost, renew that avowedly Christian aspect of our shared identity in order to know who we are in a post-modern world, and to communicate that identity to any who will listen.

My second suggestion has to do with how a renewing church on the cutting edge engages its world, how that communication can occur. Here I must confess that I risk falling off the cutting edge and tumbling down the slippery slope, for I will speak of things I do not fully grasp, indeed hardly fathom at all, but they seem compelling in spite of that. I am speaking of my growing conviction that a renewing church on the cutting edge must be present in cyberspace, must come to life on websites, in blogs, and, yes, God forbid, in commercials on television and the Internet, even becoming a spamming church, and I don't mean canned pork. It troubles my soul to be suggesting all this, but I see no way around it, without giving up on making contact with post-modernity. Watch any random group in a shopping mall, on a college campus, in an airport, on a downtown street and what are they doing? They are talking on their cell phones, listening to I-Pod music, text messaging, checking their e-mail—they are in cyberspace, they are somewhere else, they are not here and now! Two weeks ago I had a kind of epiphany of the cyber world, not surprisingly in the supermarket. Ahead of me in the fruit and vegetable section was a tall young man, pushing his grocery cart, an open laptop computer strapped to his chest with a clever leather harness on which he typed with one

hand, all the while talking on one of these over-the-ear cell phones. Talk about multi-tasking! This is not the brave new world that Orwell had in mind.

My natural bent is to make fun of all that, as I am doing now, and to dismiss it as a passing aberration. But I must not. This is the world in which your church and mine must find a way to be present, to be vividly present, to get our message out where it will be seen, even if the message is deleted. The national UCC commercials with the bouncers, the seat-ejectors, the girl with her folded church hands, and the repeated mantra—"all the people, all the people, all the people"—suggest something about the communicative technology we must learn to use—vivid pictorial images, short phrases, and repeated simple messages. A new book that just came to my notice may help, but I have not had the opportunity to read it. It is entitled, *Reaching Out in a Networked World: Expressing Your Congregation's Heart and Soul*, by Lynne M. Baab, published by the Alban Institute. You cannot imagine how it grieves my modern, rational, discursive, long-winded soul to acknowledge our need to enter the cyber-world vigorously. But there it is: the cyber-world at the center of the actual post-modern world. Will we learn how to engage it, in the Jacksonville Church, in my church in Minneapolis, in all our churches?

In its storied history, the Jacksonville Congregational United Church of Christ has lived on the edge, and on edge. I pray, with you, that this new edge where our old-line churches move into post-modernity, can become as telling a time as it was in those past times, and that, confused and baffled as we may be, God's Spirit will nevertheless guide us into new paths of faithful witness and service, so that our descendants will honor us in their time, as we now honor our ancestors, always living on (the) edge.