

“JOURNEYING WITH POET MARY OLIVER”

Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

May 17, 2026

Guest Speaker: Rev. Bruce A. Bode

Service Leader: Dianne Whitaker

Story for All Ages: Anni Lanigan

Musicians: Harmony Rutter, LeRoy Davidson, Candace Brower

Sermon Title & Description: “Journeying with Poet Mary Oliver” – A number of modern poets have found language expressing my personal religious journey. Mary Oliver is certainly one of those poets. This service will bring forward a number of her poems.

Quotations for slides before service

“So many of us live most of our lives seeking the answerable and somehow demeaning or bypassing those things that can’t be answered, therefore denuding one’s life of the acceptance of mystery and the pleasure of mystery. The willingness to live with mystery is greatly what I think about. And if I could do something for people, I would say love – don’t forget – the mystery. Love the mystery, be glad of it. Don’t want answers all the time.”

(Mary Oliver, comments in an interview with Coleman Barks, August 4, 2001)

“Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.”

(Mary Oliver, “Sometimes,” *Red Bird*, p. 37)

Lighting the Chalice

We light this chalice to the mystery within us
reaching out to the mystery beyond us.

(Jacob Trapp, adapted)

Greeting by Minister, Introduction of Theme, Opening Words

Greetings to all of you, both to those of you present here in the sanctuary and to those of you tuning in virtually.

A month ago on April 19, my sermon with you was titled “The Realm and Experience of Mystery. It concluded with a six-minute YouTube video from 2001 of poet Mary Oliver reading two poems, along with a clip of her being interviewed by fellow poet Coleman Barks, a translator of the Persian poet Rumi, whose translation of a Rumi poem we just sang in our Gathering Hymn and whose translations of Rumi Mary Oliver much valued.

I first came across Mary Oliver’s poetry about forty years ago in the mid-1980s and have read all, or nearly all, of the poems and essays that she has published. So, I thought today – following up my references to her in the service a month ago – that I would share with

you part of my journey with Mary Oliver, reading some of her poems and touching on some of the themes of her poems that have been of interest and value to me. Let me begin with Opening Words from a Mary Oliver poem titled “Praying”:

Opening Words

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

(Mary Oliver, “Praying,” from *Thirst*, p. 37)

Introduction to Responsive Reading

In keeping with the theme of paying attention and an opening into “prayer,” please join me in a Responsive Reading of one of Mary Oliver’s most well-known poems titled “The Summer Day,” a poem first published in 1990 in her book *House of Light*. In an interview 25 years after the publication of this poem, and in regard to its origin, Mary Oliver said:

“One thing about that poem, which I think is important, is that the grasshopper [which is mentioned in the poem] actually existed.... And the sugar he was eating was part of frosting from a ... birthday cake, which wasn't important to the poem. But even seeing that little creature come to my plate and say, ‘I'd like a little helping of that.’ It somehow fascinates me....”

(“Mary Oliver: Listening to the World,” interview by Krista Tippett from *On Being*, original Air Date of Interview: February 5, 2015)

Responsive Reading

MINISTER: Who made the world? Who made the swan, and the black bear?

CONGREGATION: Who made the grasshopper? This grasshopper, I mean –

MINISTER: The one who has flung herself out of the grass,

CONGREGATION: The one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

MINISTER: Who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down –

CONGREGATION: Who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

MINISTER: Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

CONGREGATION: Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

MINISTER: I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

CONGREGATION: I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

MINISTER: How to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields, which is what I have been doing all day.

CONGREGATION: Tell me, what else should I have done? Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

MINISTER: Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

(Mary Oliver, "The Summer Day," *House of Light*, p. 60)

Opening Hymn #1010: "We Give Thanks"

Oh, we give thanks for this precious day,
For all gather'd here, and those far away;
For this time we share with love and care,
Oh, we give thanks for this precious day.

(Words & music: Wendy Luella Perkins; arr. Susan Peck)

Sermon, Part I: "Journeying with Poet Mary Oliver: The Poet Finding Her Way"

Introduction

Beginning in my early adulthood, the messages of a number of modern poets have been important in my own religious journey. And one of the poets who has meant the most to me in this regard is the modern American poet Mary Oliver, who lived from 1935 to 2019.

I've been fortunate as a minister to be part of religious organizations, including the Unitarian Universalist Association, that have welcomed modern poetry as a source for religious expression and inspiration. In this regard, over the years of my ministry, I've facilitated many adult religious education classes on modern poets, one of whom is Mary Oliver. Just a week ago, I concluded a 6-week class at the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Port Townsend on her poetry, probably about the eighth such class I've facilitated on her poetry in my ministerial career.

So, this morning, as I mentioned earlier, I thought I'd share a couple of the themes and a few of the poems from Mary Oliver that have been resources for me on my religious

journey ... in the hope that they might also have some value for you. I'm dividing my sermon into three parts, with musical interludes between the three parts.

Not a “confessional poet”

Mary Oliver is not what is called a “confessional poet” ... in that she doesn't deliberately share a lot of personal detail of her life. Only late in her life do we find her sharing some more personal detail in some of her poems.

At the same time, however, she does use the word “I” in many of her poems. In one of her very few interviews, this one with Krista Tippett in the radio program *On Being* in 2015 when Mary Oliver was eighty years old, she says:

And always I wanted the “I.” Many of the poems are “I did this. I did this. I saw this.” I wanted the “I” to be the possible reader, rather than about myself. It was about an experience that happened to be mine but could well have been anybody else's. That was my feeling about the “I.” I have been criticized by one editor who felt that “I” would be felt as ego. And I thought, no, well, I'm going to risk it and see. And I think it worked. It enjoined the reader into the experience of the poem.

The Journey

One of the first Mary Oliver poems I ever came across, maybe the first, back somewhere in the 1980s was titled “The Journey.” In this poem, she uses the word “you,” which certainly does bring the reader into the poem ... but one might also wonder what the personal experience – the “I” experience – was that was behind this poem.

The Journey

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice –
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!”
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy

was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do –
determined to save
the only life you could save.

(Mary Oliver, "The Journey," from *Dream Work*, p. 38)

In regard to this poem, in an interview with Maria Shriver in 2011 when Mary Oliver was 76 years old, Shriver says to Mary Oliver:

Maria Shriver: So you never wanted your poetry to be a place where you worked out your own struggles. And yet "The Journey," my all-time favorite poem, seems to deal with darker themes.

Mary Oliver: Well, looking back, I'm shocked to see that I wrote that. Because I was always very private about my life, and yet the poems in *Dream Work* are not so private as I thought.

One of those poems in *Dream Work*, which I'm not going to read in full this morning, is titled "Rage." In her interview with Krista Tippett in 2015 Mary Oliver says she didn't even consciously know at the time that this poem was about her father. Only later, working with a therapist, did that come out.

That poem ends with these lines:

In your dreams she's a tree
That will never come to leaf –
in your dreams she's a watch
you dropped on the dark stones
till no one could gather the fragments –
in your dreams you have sullied and murdered, and dreams do not lie.

(Mary Oliver, "Rage," from *Dream Work*, 1986)

But Mary Oliver's approach in her poems was to try to find a way through, not to emphasize the damage in her personal life. As she said to Maria Shriver in their interview:

“... well, there are millions of people walking around the world who had insufficient childhoods, and I just happen to be one of them.”

Finding her way

How did she find her way?

Here's a late-life poem from her book *A Thousand Mornings*, published in 2012, titled “Hurricane.”

The poem comes from the time after the death of her 40-year partner Molly Malone Cook, when Mary Oliver had moved from Provincetown, Massachusetts where they had lived their lives, to Florida.

Hurricane

It didn't behave
like anything you had
ever imagined. The wind
tore at the trees, the rain
fell for days slant and hard.
The back of the hand
to everything. I watched
the trees bow and their leaves fall
and crawl back into the earth.
As though, that was that.
This was one hurricane
I lived through, the other one
was of a different sort, and
lasted longer. Then
I felt my own leaves giving up and
falling. *The back of the hand to
everything.* But listen now to what happened
to the actual trees;
toward the end of that summer they
pushed new leaves from their stubbed limbs.
It was the wrong season, yes,
but they couldn't stop. They
looked like telephone poles and didn't
care. And after the leaves came
blossoms. For some things
there are no wrong seasons.
Which is what I dream of for me.

(Mary Oliver, “Hurricane,” from *A Thousand Mornings*, pp. 21-22)

Two sources of salvation

There were two sources that enabled Mary Oliver to come to leaf and to blossom. One was her connection to nature and a second was her connection to poets. To illustrate, I'll read one poem from each sustaining source.

One of Mary Oliver's most well-known and beloved poems related to her connection to nature is titled "Wild Geese," also from her book *Dream Work*, and following immediately after her poem "Rage" in this book.

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

(Mary Oliver, "Wild Geese," *Dream Work*, p. 14)

Mary Oliver was also sustained by a number of poets. Her friends in her youth were poets that she read, such as Walt Whitman. In an essay titled "My Friend Walt Whitman," she says that "Whitman was the brother I did not have." (Mary Oliver, "My Friend Walt Whitman," *Blue Pastures*, p. 13)

Then, when she lived in Provincetown, Massachusetts at the end of Cape Cod, she became a "dear friend" ("New England Life," by Mary Oliver, 7) of Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Stanley Kunitz, who was known in Provincetown for the marvelous garden he kept.

(Flossie and I had a chance to see that garden some years ago, though Kunitz himself had passed by that time.)

The poem, also from the book *Dream Work* is titled "Stanley Kunitz.

Stanley Kunitz

I used to imagine him
coming from the house, like Merlin
strolling with important gestures
through the garden
where everything grows so thickly,
where birds sing, little snakes lie
on the boughs, thinking of nothing
but their own good lives,
where petals float upward,
their colors exploding,
and trees open their moist
pages of thunder –
it has happened every summer for years.

But now I know more
about the great wheel of growth,
and decay, and rebirth,
and know my vision for a falsehood.
Now I see him coming from the house –
I see him on his knees,
cutting away the diseased, the superfluous,
coaxing the new,
knowing the hour of fulfillment
is buried in years of patience –
 yet willing to labor like that
on the mortal wheel.

Oh, what good it does the heart
to know it isn't magic!
Like the human child I am
I rush to imitate –
I watch him as he bends
among the leaves and vines
to hook some weed or other;
even when I do not see him,
I think of him there
raking and trimming, stirring up
those sheets of fire
between the smothering weights of earth,
the wild and shapeless air.

(Mary Oliver, "Stanley Kunitz," *Dream Work*, pp. 44-45)

This poem is also a metaphor for the labor involved in bringing forth a poem.

Interlude Hymn #396: “I Know This Rose Will Open”

Mary Oliver has many marvelous poems about roses, which I won't have a chance to read today. But let's take our first musical break to sing “I Know This Rose Will Open,” #396 in our gray-covered hymnals.

I know this rose will open.
I know my fear will burn away.
I know my soul will unfurl its wings.
I know this rose will open.

(Words & music: Mary E. Grigolia)

Sermon, Part II: “Journeying with Poet Mary Oliver: Embracing the Mystery”

One of the themes from the poems of Mary Oliver that I have greatly appreciated is her embrace of “mystery.” A month ago in my sermon titled “The Realm and Experience of Mystery,” I transcribed some lines from an interview with fellow poet Coleman Barks in which Mary Oliver said:

“So many of us live most of our lives seeking the answerable and somehow demeaning or bypassing those things that can't be answered, therefore denuding one's life of the acceptance of mystery and the pleasure of mystery. The willingness to live with mystery is greatly what I think about,” she says. “And if I could do something for people, I would say love – don't forget – the mystery. Love the mystery, be glad of it. Don't want answers all the time.”)

(Mary Oliver, comments in an interview with Coleman Barks, August 4, 2001)

I ended my sermon last month by inviting you to watch and listen to the 6-minute YouTube video from which I transcribed her statements. And I'd like to invite you to watch and listen to it again, as I find both delight and value in the perspective she has on “mystery.” It's an interview from 2001 with Coleman Barks, a poet and translator of the Persian poet Rumi, who had invited Mary Oliver to speak, I believe at the University of Georgia.

This 6-minute clip begins with Mary Oliver reading two poems, including “Wild Geese, followed by a part of an interview with Coleman Barks, who died this past February at the age of 88.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnKUKmcFVuo>)

“Mystery: God's other name”

Let me read two short poems in relation to “mystery.”

The first is titled “Trying to Be Thoughtful in the First Brights of Dawn” from her book *Swan*, a poem playing on the tension between head and heart.

Trying to Be Thoughtful in the First Brights of Dawn

I am thinking, or trying to think, about all the
imponderables for which we have
no answers, yet endless interest all the
range of our lives, and it's

good for the head no doubt to undertake such
meditation; Mystery, after all,
is God's other name, and deserves our

consideration surely. But, but –
excuse me now, please; it's morning, heavenly bright,
and my irrepressible heart begs me to hurry on
into the next exquisite moment.

(Mary Oliver, from *Swan*, p. 48)

And the second poem is titled "Mysteries, Yes," from her book titled *Evidence*.

Mysteries, Yes

Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous
to be understood.

How grass can be nourishing in the
mouths of the lambs.
How rivers and stones are forever
in allegiance with gravity
while we ourselves dream of rising.
How two hands touch and the bonds will
never be broken.
How people come, from delight or the
scars of damage,
to the comfort of a poem.

Let me keep my distance, always, from those
who think they have the answers.

Let me keep company always with those who say
"Look!" and laugh in astonishment,
and bow their heads.

(Mary Oliver, from *Evidence*, p. 62)

Interlude Song: “Let the Mystery Be,” Iris Dement, sung by Harmony Rutter

For our second musical break, I’ve asked Harmony to sing, as she did a month ago, the well-known 1992 folk song from singer Iris Dement titled “Let the Mystery Be.”

Everybody is a wonderin’ what and where they all came from
Everybody is a worryin’ ‘bout where
They’re gonna go when the whole thing’s done
But no one knows for certain and so it’s all the same to me
I think I’ll just let the mystery be

Some say once you’re gone you’re gone forever
And some say you’re gonna come back
Some say you rest in the arms of
The Saviour if in sinful ways you lack
Some say that they’re comin’ back in a
Garden, bunch of carrots and little sweet peas
I think I’ll just let the mystery be

Everybody is a wonderin’ what and where they all came from
Everybody is a worryin’ ‘bout where
They’re gonna go when the whole thing’s done
But no one knows for certain and so it’s all the same to me
I think I’ll just let the mystery be

Some say they’re goin’ to a place called
Glory and I ain’t saying it ain’t a fact
But I’ve heard that I’m on the road to
Purgatory and I don’t like the sound of that
Well, I believe in love and I live my life accordingly
But I choose to let the mystery be

Everybody is a wonderin’ what and where they all came from
Everybody is a worryin’ ‘bout where
They’re gonna go when the whole thing’s done
But no one knows for certain and so it’s all the same to me
I think I’ll just let the mystery be
I think I’ll just let the mystery be
(“Let the Mystery Be,” by Iris Dement)

Sermon, Part III: “Journeying with Poet Mary Oliver: A Human Tension on the Journey”

I’d like to close this short journey with Mary Oliver by bringing forward a theme that runs through much of her poetry, namely, a tension I touched on a couple of minutes ago between:

head and heart,
left-brain and right-brain,
worrying and wondering,
seeking and surrendering,
particularity and universality,
twoness and oneness.

Mary Oliver has many poems in which she's envious of non-human forms of life and wishes she could partake of what she sees as their equanimity and beauty.

Here's a poem titled "Lilies" in which, following the saying of Jesus to "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin (Matthew 6:28, KJV), she wishes she could be like the lilies of the field in this way.

But watch what happens when she considers this proposition.

Lilies

I have been thinking
about living
like the lilies
that blow in the fields.

They rise and fall
in the edge of the wind,
and have no shelter
from the tongues of the cattle,

and have no closets or cupboards,
and have no legs.
Still I would like to be
as wonderful

as that old idea.
But if I were a lily
I think I would wait all day
for the green face

of the hummingbird
to touch me.
What I mean is,
could I forget myself

even in those feathery fields?
When Van Gogh

preached to the poor
of course he wanted to save someone –

most of all himself.
He wasn't a lily,
and wandering through the bright fields
only gave him more ideas

it would take his life to solve.
I think I will always be lonely
in this world, where the cattle
graze like a black and white river –

where the vanishing lilies
melt, without protest, on their tongues –
where the hummingbird, whenever there is a fuss,
just rises and floats away.

(Mary Oliver, "Lilies," from *House of Light*, pp. 12-13)

Despite Mary Oliver's envy of non-human forms of being, she also sometimes recognizes and celebrates our human capacity to judge, evaluate, imagine, praise, and pay attention. Here's an interesting prose poem titled *Yes! No!*

Yes! No!

How necessary it is to have opinions! I think the spotted trout
lilies are satisfied, standing a few inches above the earth. I
think serenity is not something you just find in the world,
like a plum tree, holding up its white petals.

The violets, along the river, are opening their blue faces, like
small dark lanterns.

The green mosses, being so many, are as good as brawny.

How important it is to walk along, not in haste but slowly,
looking at everything and calling out

Yes! No! The

swan, for all his pomp, his robes of grass and petals, wants
only to be allowed to live on the nameless pond. The catbrier
is without fault. The water thrushes, down among the sloppy
rocks, are going crazy with happiness. Imagination is better
than a sharp instrument. To pay attention, this is our endless
and proper work.

(Mary Oliver, *Yes! No!*, from *White Pine*, p. 8)

In the Forward to a book of essays titled *Long Life*, Mary Oliver writes:

“Poets must read and study, but also they must learn to tilt and whisper, shout, or dance, each in his or her own way, or we might just as well copy the old books. But, no, that would never do, for always the new self swimming around in the old world feels itself uniquely verbal. And that is just the point: how the world, moist and bountiful, calls to each of us to make a new and serious response. That's the big question, the one the world throws at you every morning. ‘Here you are, alive. Would you like to make a comment.’”

(Mary Oliver, from the Forward of *LONG LIFE: Essays and Other Writings*, p. xiv, 2004)

Poems about her dog Percy

Fairly late in life, Mary Oliver started addressing this tension between head and heart, thinking and being, in a bit of a humorous way with the assistance of her little dog Percy, who came to live with her and her partner Molly Malone Cook in 2002 when Mary Oliver was in her late sixties.

Over the years, Mary Oliver wrote about fifteen poems about Percy, several of them that are found in her book titled *Dog Songs*. Here are three short ones:

Percy

Our new dog, named for the beloved poet,
ate a book which unfortunately we had
left unguarded.
Fortunately, it was the Bhagavad Gita,
of which many copies are available.
Every day now, as Percy grows
into the beauty of his life, we touch
his wild, curly head and say,

“Oh, wisest of little dogs.”

(Mary Oliver, “Percy,” from *Dog Songs*, p. 47)

Then the eighth poem in the Percy series is titled “Percy and Books,” a follow-up to Percy eating the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Percy and Books (Eight)

Percy does not like it when I read a book.
He puts his face over the top of it and moans.
He rolls his eyes, sometimes he sneezes.
The sun is up, he says, and the wind is down.
The tide is out, and the neighbor's dogs are playing.

But Percy, I say, Ideas! The elegance of language!
The insights, the funniness, the beautiful stories
that rise and fall and turn into strength, or courage.

Books? says Percy. I ate one once, and it was not enough.
Let's go.

(Mary Oliver, "Percy," from *Red Bird*, p. 29)

Then this Percy poem, remembering him after his death:

Percy (2002-2009)

This – I said to Percy when I had left
our bed and gone
out onto the living room couch where
he found me apparently doing nothing – this
is called *thinking*.
It's something people do,
not being entirely children of the earth,
like a dog or a tree or a flower.

His eyes questioned such an activity.
"Well, okay," he said. "If you say so. Whatever
it is. Actually
I like kissing better."

And next to me,
tucked down his curly head
and, sweet as a flower, slept.

(Mary Oliver, "Percy (2002-2009)," from *Dog Songs*, p. 67)

A poem to wrap-up

And now one final poem to wrap things up, one of my very favorites, titled "Long Afternoon at the Edge of Little Sister Pond." It's the concluding poem from her book *Owls and Other Fantasies*:

Long Afternoon at the Edge of Little Sister Pond

As for life,
I'm humbled,
I'm without words
sufficient to say

how it has been hard as flint,
and soft as a spring pond,
both of these

and over and over

and long pale afternoons besides,
and so many mysteries
beautiful as eggs in a nest,
still unhatched

though warm and watched over
by something I have never seen –
a tree angel, perhaps,
or a ghost of holiness.

Every day I walk out into the world
to be dazzled, then to be reflective.
It suffices, it is all comfort –
along with human love,

dog love, water love, little-serpent love,
sunburst love, or love for that smallest of birds
flying among the scarlet flowers.
There is hardly time to think about

stopping, and lying down at last
to the long afterlife, to the tenderness
yet to come, when
time will brim over the singular pond, and become forever,

and we will pretend to melt away into the leaves.
As for death,
I can't wait to be the hummingbird,
can you?

(Mary Oliver, "Long Afternoon at the Edge of Little Sister Pond," *Owls and Other Fantasies*, pp. 60-61)

Closing Hymn #123: "Spirit of Life"

Our Closing Hymn, often considered to be the Unitarian Universalist anthem is "Spirit of Life," #123 in your gray-covered hymnals.

Spirit of Life, come unto me.
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;
move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close; wings set me free;
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

(Carolyn McDade, words & music)

Closing Words

Our Closing Words from Mary Oliver are these:

“Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.”

(Mary Oliver, “Sometimes,” *Red Bird*, p. 37)

Extinguishing the Chalice

We extinguish this flame,
But not the Light of Truth,
The Warmth of Community,
The Fire of Commitment,
Or the Power of Transformation;
These we carry in our hearts
Until we are together again.

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of the service led by the Rev. Bruce A. Bode at the Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sequim/Port Angeles, WA on Sunday, May 17, 2026. Rev. Bode is minister emeritus at the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (QUUF) in Port Townsend, Washington, from which he retired in 2018 as the senior minister after serving the congregation for fourteen years (2004-2018).

Before coming to Port Townsend, Rev. Bode was the interim minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston, Texas (2002-2004) and the Hope Unitarian Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma (2001-2002). Prior to that, he served for twenty-two years (1978-2001) as an associate minister at the Fountain Street Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a large, independent, religiously liberal congregation.