

City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



Date: Sunday October 18th, 2015

Subject: Welcoming Remarks at an organ concert held at United Church on the Green in celebration of the 200 year history of the three churches on the New Haven Green.

Good afternoon, everybody! Thank you, Pastor Bonnie Scott, for the introduction and for organizing this event. It is my pleasure to be here among all of you today.

We're together today in one of this historic city's most historic sites. We have come together to worship, to listen and to sing, to pray and to recognize the generations of communities that have passed through these hallowed halls.

Most importantly, we are gathered here today to celebrate the history we share in New Haven, the respect we share for that history, and the legacy we preserve on occasions like this one.

Two hundred years ago, three landmarks rose to distinguish New Haven and to this day they still define this prominent part of town. They were, even then, beautiful buildings of distinct architectural styles: one in Federal redbrick, one in Georgian colonial, and the other in gothic revival.

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They sit along a single block of what is now Temple Street, in the geographic center of America’s first planned city. For now two-hundred years, the buildings have welcomed millions to discover the Elm City.

They were here in 1839 when the captives of the slave ship the *Amistad* revolted, washing up on the shores of Connecticut and landing in a city jail. They were here in 1860 when candidate Abraham Lincoln spoke in New Haven on slavery and earned his reputation for “rail-splitting.”

They were here a hundred years later as the Black Panther trials vaulted the Green into the national spotlight. They were here decades later when New Haveners protested the cruelty of South African apartheid.

They were here then, and here they are today: strong, central, and beautiful as ever. At their 200th birthday, we know them as three churches: the United Church to the north; the Trinity Church to the south; and the Center Church in between.

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Each of these three storied institutions boasts histories of their own, histories rich with memories, teachings, hardships and triumphs.

As we join together today in the unity of the joint bicentennial, let us remember what these three fixtures at the center of New Haven life share in common: an inexhaustible faith in the power of community.

We would not be in this very Meeting House today if two-hundred years of communities just like this one didn't fight to preserve what's worth holding onto. We would not be here celebrating the architecture, music, and life of these three National Historic landmarks if not for the tireless work of patrons across this great city.

The men and women who sustained these churches for two hundred years built faith into the foundation of New Haven. Whatever your religious background, each of us brings to these important sites a common faith that common citizens can enjoy and celebrate the splendor of everyday life.

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And whether you are a lifelong member or a first-time face, know that these three communities welcome you with open arms. Know that they invite you to join in today's songs and celebrations as an honored member of their home.

New Haven owes much to the United, Trinity, and Center churches. Each one works day after day to end many of persistent issues before this city. Each one shines a great light upon our beloved city. We owe them our gratitude and our many thanks.

So as we get ready to listen to a piece commissioned for United Church organist Caesar Storlazzi on the famous, majestic Hillebrand organ, let us commit to the work we must do to ensure two hundred years more of these churches in New Haven.

Thank you very much.

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