

**Remarks of Mayor Noam Bramson**  
**Union Baptist Church**  
**February 20, 2011**

To Pastor & Lady Hudson. To the many distinguished members of the clergy who are present. To my colleagues in government. To neighbors from throughout New Rochelle and beyond. And, most of all, to the Unionites in the house: I say good afternoon. And it is a good afternoon.

We are gathered today from many faiths and traditions. In worship we read different phrases and sing different songs. Yet on this occasion, we perceive clearly the truth of the words of Malachi: "Have we not all one father. Did not one God create us all."

We are bound together. So I greet you in this spirit, representing a community that stands united in an hour of trial.

And when I claim we are united, it is no idle boast. I have seen it. Today, we have all seen it.

The Fire Fighters who labored through a long night and into a long day, struggling to save what could be saved.

The advocates from churches and synagogues, most of whom had no personal connection to Union, but who were impelled to action by faith and moral purpose.

The spiritual family of Trinity-St. Paul's, which opened its doors without hesitation or doubt, saying: today, our home is your home.

And the countless other citizens, many perhaps unaffiliated with any institution, who read and saw the news one week ago, and then, instead of retreating to their daily cares, stopped to ask: what can I do?

There is no denying the scope of loss, or the depth of distress, or the difficulty of the challenges ahead, but my first message to the people of Union Baptist is that you are not alone.

A city of 75,000 is ready and willing to offer its hands to your cause.

But who is really helping whom? Because I feel certain that all who come to your aid will receive from you in return something of far greater worth.

We receive from you an example. Of strength and resilience. Of a congregation determined to make this no tragic chapter in its history, but rather a chapter of faith renewed and a house rebuilt.

And surely this is a lesson for each of us. Whether greater or lesser, whether products of chance or divine will, in every life there are moments of adversity.

The test is how we face them . . . for the Almighty does not ask of his children any more than he has equipped us to do.

So my second message to the people of Union Baptist is one of thanks . . . for the manner in which you have inspired your neighbors and reminded us that hope is present wherever faith endures.

Lastly, let us speak of material things. The house of worship at Locust and Main, that began its life as Salem Baptist and in the fullness of time became Union, is one of those rare structures around which history itself seems to revolve.

To look upon it is to see in our mind's eye things long gone. The ever-shifting form of the surrounding city, rising and falling with the passage of years. The whirl of humanity, in new style of dress for each season, racing to myriad purposes and ends.

We imagine the clatter of horses gradually ceding to the rumble of cars. And we imagine even the sweat upon the brow of the workmen, names now beyond recollection, whose talent and craft were poured into each block of stone, lovingly laid one atop another, until the whole was a thing of beauty.

For all who admire this place, the sight today of a work of art, unroofed, bereft of its walls and its windows, a hall once of song and praise, now filled with

embers and fallen rock . . . this sight is heartbreaking.

And though a new house should rise and shall rise, perhaps even finer, we will never forget the old.

Yet however beloved and stately, whatever the skill applied to their shaping and whatever the artistry of their design, walls of stone are walls of stone – given purpose and meaning only from the souls and minds within.

And because those souls and minds endure – lifted with fresh purpose, aided by new friends, and sure in the knowledge of a just and compassionate God – in the way that matters most, the church of Union Baptist stands now as tall and as proud and as strong as it has ever been.

I am honored to be in your company. And may we together prove worthy of God's blessing.