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For the Good of the City: Honoring Frank and Margaret Baldwin

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"See what love can do" was the message of the first sermon delivered at the Orinda Community Church in 1998 by Rev. Frank Baldwin, who will retire at the end of this month. Photos Ohlen Alexander

also spoke of the leadership by Baldwin and his congregants with regard to the Winter Nights homeless shelter. When City officials realized they would not have enough space to accommodate the many Orindans who wanted to make their voices heard in debates over the contentious issue, OCC offered the use of its Sanctuary. "We had a whole night where we had really thoughtful discussion," said Worth.

Baldwin's ability to get people talking - and keep them communicating - was cited as one of his major strengths. "Right after Frank Baldwin became Pastor at Orinda Community Church," said former Mayor Bobbie Landers, "I came onto the Board of the Orinda Senior Village. At the time there seemed to be some turmoil between the Church and the Board, but within a few small meetings Frank was able to smooth out the wrinkles."

She also recalled his support for Orinda's Sister City program. "We were able to hold several fundraising concerts in the Church and Tabor sent a delegation to Orinda with a crystal flagon for that congregation. But, what I did not know then, was Frank was a great history buff and, as a result, the City appointed him to the Orinda Landmark Committee.... Frank almost single-handedly helped restore the Olde Train Station."

The Baldwins attribute the manner in which they approach challenges to their families, saying they were both raised "in a climate of kindness."

"Both teachers and preachers have a responsibility to set a tone - in the classroom and in the congregation," said Baldwin. Grace, forgiveness, and compassion "creep out of the congregation and into the community."

"Kindness does not mean weakness," agreed Margaret. It is simply "an attitude of respect" that one shows toward others even in difficult situations. It is the standard for how to behave.

The Baldwins spoke of their gratitude to the community with Frank saying he would "like to be remembered as someone who loved this congregation and loved this town." Margaret hopes "that a generation of kids learned to love learning," and "loved learning language because of Madame Baldwin."

Margaret and Frank will be relocating to Portland, where they plan to spend time getting reacquainted with the

Orinda City Council meetings are often dry, occasionally heated, and when at their best, bring citizens together to honor their neighbors for contributions made for the good of the City. On May 15, that is precisely what happened as Reverend Frank Baldwin was recognized for his efforts to make Orinda kinder and its discourse more civil.

Baldwin, a Berkeley native who graduated from the Yale Divinity School, is retiring at the end of this month from his appointment to the Orinda Historic Landmark Committee and as pastor at the Orinda Community Church (OCC) where he has served since 1998.

His wife, Margaret, is also retiring from Head-Royce School where she has taught French language and culture since 2000. Sweethearts since Berkeley High, the Baldwins have been a strong voice for those least able to advocate for themselves.

"Kindness," said Leslie Darwin O'Brien, OCC's Director of Community Life, is the first word which comes to mind when she thinks of Frank Baldwin. "He always takes the time to find out what is really going on in someone's life... in someone's heart."

"I think of Frank as a very caring person," said Council Member Victoria Smith. "He has done a lot to make the church a focal point - even for people who don't necessarily have a religious affiliation."

Both Smith and her colleague, Vice Mayor Amy Worth, mentioned Baldwin's work with affordable senior housing programs as an example of the good he has done, noting that while Council members focused on program quality and cost in their negotiations with Eden Housing, Baldwin's eyes were trained on the services that would be offered to keep seniors in their homes as long as possible before needing to transition to nursing homes. "He'd push at every juncture," and those services, said Smith, are "what will make the project a wonderful place to live and not just a beautiful building to look at."

Observing that OCC "is broader than its walls," Worth

area where they lived 40 years ago. "Anxious to do some gardening," Margaret also hopes to become part of a French-speaking community there, and is looking forward to having time to take walks every day.

Frank plans to return to interests he has deferred over the years. Good with his hands and tools, he'll likely spend time working on the older house they're moving into, as well as indulging his other passion - the restoration of old British sports cars. They'll also spend time with grandkids and travel, eventually returning as tourists to the Bay Area.

Asked for a last message for the community, Baldwin paused for quite some time before responding. "See what love can do," he said. "Love is a mystery. We often don't know where it's going to lead us. You can trust it and be glad in it. It will never let you down."

Orinda residents will have one more chance to express their love to Frank and Margaret Baldwin. A concert and gala dinner will be held at 4 p.m. Sunday, May 27, at the Orinda Community Church. For details, visit orindachurch.org.



Rev. Frank Baldwin, pastor of the Orinda Community Church who is retiring at the end of May from both the Church and his appointment to the Orinda Historic Landmark Committee, is honored by the Orinda City Council for his contributions to the city, from left: Baldwin, Mayor Steve Glazer, and Council Members Dean Orr, Victoria Smith, and Sue Severson.

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