
Preface

Jokingly, but with a hint of seriousness, Elly and Jerry Dickason told me that when the Judson community fully understood and appreciated the rich history of Judson House that this volume lays open, the congregation's action to sell the property would be rescinded and enough money would be raised in the twinkling of an eye to restore the old place for another century of service.

I only wish this kind of magic were possible and that the money needed to restore Judson House would have fallen out of the sky. No one has enjoyed the plunge into the unknown that the decision to sell the Judson House land has entailed. The greatest fear, I think, is that we will trade in a history that has been vibrant and yeasty and full of daring for a bland future in which Judson behaves more and more like any other institution in our increasingly homogenized culture. I believe there is also a sense out there that the old crumbly building metaphorically signaled Judson's absolute independence in a way that six thousand square feet of Judson space within a spanking-new New York University Law School building won't ever be able to communicate.

Those of us working on the sale of the building have done everything possible to combat the sterility threat. We have found ways to link our new space directly to the landmarked main church building, so that the Judson spirit can freely infiltrate the space that NYU Law will build for us. More important, we staunchly resisted efforts by the Law School's lawyers to put boilerplate use restrictions in the condo agreement governing our space. It was clear they did not understand how much our freedom matters to us; they do now.

Deep down, however, we all know that the question of how much the spirit of the old Judson House can be sustained in a new era has little to do with legal documents or space layouts. It has everything to do with us: with how youthful and how feisty our own spir-

its feel, and with whether we still see the church as the vehicle for all forms of spiritual and artistic and social renewal and for all expressions of liberatory praxis. We could keep the old building, keep the garden, and still lose the passion, still let our light flicker out.

My hope and my prayer are that along with renewed and revived physical spaces, Judson members and friends will come to realize that along with having had some fabulous good old days, this church as an outpost of freedom has some great new days lying right ahead of it.

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