What a beautiful evening and a beautiful gathering of community we have shared tonight.

I am honored to speak briefly with you about my 40+ years as a member of the Covenant community. Many of you know some of the details of my journey with Covenant, so forgive me if I repeat stories you have heard before.

I came to Covenant as an elementary school student when my family moved from Ft. Worth to Houston in the early 1970s. So, joining Covenant was not my decision. My wise parents searched for and found a place that would nurture and mold me and my family these many decades.

I could speak for hours about the role of Covenant in my development. Tonight let me share only a few memories.

About the intellectual stimulation I received here: I was in High School when Jeff Martin left Houston for Harvard and Gini Burrus enrolled at Yale. Very few seniors from Sharpstown High School ventured farther than College Station or maybe Baton Rouge. Watching role models move to (and succeed on) the East Coast gave me motivation and inspiration to consider a broader path. I followed their lead away from home, although I turned left--geographically, and maybe politically--to the West Coast. Portland, Oregon and Reed College became my home for 4 years. I am convinced that my decision to leave Houston and Texas was related in no small part to the example I witnessed by the trailblazers (in my 16 year old eyes) Gini and Jeff.

About growing in my theological understanding: I was in Junior High when I entered Covenant's conversation about naming God: articulating a gender-inclusive / a gender-neutrality / an all-inclusive God unbound by He, or even, Her. Imagine my Monday mornings in World History class, following a conversation with Leon Meeks and Jeannie Gambill about the birth myth of the hero.

About my deep belief in social justice: I remember sharing with pride that my church had formed (at least in part) as a result of another church's decision in the early 1960s to entertain racial exclusion. In the 1980s Covenant's vocal welcome of gay men, lesbians, couples and families; leaving the Southern Baptist Convention because of exclusion of gay leaders and women informed my image of a radical inclusion that mirrored Jesus' ministry. I understood what "living a first century faith in the 20th century" really looked like: It looked beautiful! Housing refugees, offering Covenant's Mission's Committee Budget to untold organizations doing good work in Houston, Pakistan, Guatemala, and elsewhere. A focus on environmental issues as witness to my understanding of my role as a co-creator with God in our fragile earth.

About compassion and community: being ordained a deacon by Covenant was an other-worldly, dare I say, grace-filled, experience. Being a deacon to a number of you helped me grow in the realization that we are our brother's and our sister's keeper. Serving and receiving communion remains one of the holiest moments of sharing our faith and our love with each other. And, on a practical level, bring a deacon taught me fantastic social skills. Introducing myself to visitors (and then remembering names!) was a skill developed during 3 years of coffee fellowship time. (Full disclosure: that skill has become rusty as I rotated off the diaconate. Note to self: work on this!!)

About the profound beauty of music: I probably need not articulate the ways music is important to me, nor the fact that Fran's tutelage has led me to an appreciation, not just of church music in general, but specifically, techniques of vocal singing and exquisite music-making. That music is a prayer, that music flings my soul to the farthest point of the universe, that music connects me to wise women and men who trod before me and will come generations after me: these understandings of the mystery of God have been graciously taught by Fran over 40 years of Thursday night choir rehearsals and active participation in worship.

These are only a few facets of the long and beautiful relationship I've had with Covenant. I've left out stories of worship planning, the Rothko chapel, deacon's meetings and deacon's groups communal meals, Advent friends, the growing bouquet of children and youth, our labyrinth, the miracle of our harpsichord, the rituals of weddings, funerals, celebrations, the challenges of a growing congregation (and especially the challenges of a not-growing congregation). And while I love to reminisce, I look with equal joy and confidence to my entwined future with a growing and vital community of faith. Which social justice experience will we embrace in the next 40 years? How will our theology develop? Who will our teachers be? Which child will lead us and where will she take us? With whom will we make music tomorrow?

As we contemplate, design and implement Covenant's next year, the next 40 years, the next 50 years at Covenant, may we do so with joy, welcome and peace, remembering both our shared history and also our highest aspirations for a communal future of love.