

My response to the East Wing of the White House being demolished for a Ball Room...

“When the Center No Longer Holds”

Dear friends,

News has come that the East Wing of the White House is being torn down — to make way for a grand new ballroom that will overshadow the rest of the structure. Alongside that, the Rose Garden has been paved over with cement and stone.

At first glance, this might seem like a matter of design or taste — architecture and landscaping, nothing more. But for those of us who see the world through a theological lens, such choices tell stories. They reveal something about who we are becoming, what we value, and where our collective heart now leans.

The White House has long stood as a symbol — complicated and imperfect, yes — but meant to represent a vision of democracy, shared leadership, and humble service. Its East Wing has housed those whose work often centers compassion, care, and community. The Rose Garden, with its living beauty, has offered a reminder that even in the halls of power, creation and creativity still have a voice.

To tear down the East Wing for grandeur, and to pave over the Rose Garden with concrete, is more than aesthetic. It is theological.

Process Theology reminds us that God is not a static ruler sitting above history but a living presence within it — coaxing, persuading, and luring creation toward wholeness. God’s power is relational, not coercive; organic, not ornamental. Creation is ongoing, ever-unfinished, and full of possibility.

To replace a garden with stone is to prefer control over cooperation. It says permanence matters more than participation — and that the living, growing, unpredictable parts of life are somehow in the way.

In a world that worships spectacle, we are reminded again: God is not found in grand ballrooms or perfect facades. God dwells in relationship — in shared meals, in gardens, in the tender labor of people who keep showing up to heal what’s been broken.

Maybe that’s what we’re called to remember right now.

That what makes a nation holy is not the shine of its marble but the mercy of its people.
That the true “house” worth building is one where everyone is welcome, and no one’s
voice or beauty is paved over.

So when we see the garden turned to stone, we must become gardeners again. We
must plant where others have poured cement, nurture life where others have chosen
power, and keep believing that resurrection can spring even from soil that’s been
sealed.

God’s lure — the divine invitation toward love, justice, and beauty — still calls to us.
Even now.
May we have ears to hear and courage to respond.

With hope and in solidarity,
Rev. Phil Richards

Grace and Peace,

Phil Richards, Lead Pastor
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He/Him/His

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**"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but
people will never forget how you made them feel."
Maya Angelou**