

Washington Gladden Social Justice Park
Dedication Day Remarks by Rev. Dr. Tim Ahrens

Before I draw this dedication to a close and turn our focus to God, ribbon cutting and “Glory!” I want to add words of thanks to all the men and women, children and youth who have participated today in this ceremony.

First, thank you to the entire staff of First Church. With Rev. Corzine leading the way, we have come this far by faith! Thank you! Thanks to the volunteers and members who have dedicated themselves to this day and to this project. A special thanks to all the moderators, Elaine Warren, Kent Shimeal, and now Joe Baszynski who guided us through the maze of this effort over three years.

Thanks too to the Park Planning Group, and now the Board of Directors and Trustees for the park who have overseen and will continue to guide our decisions and directions moving forward. You have been rocks in the stream of this process!

To Alejandro Rodriguez, chairperson of the WGSJP Trustees and today's leader of the dedication, thank you. Thanks as well to all of you, my friends, colleagues and my heroes, who have led us in this dedication

To all of you who have weathered a Nor-Easter! To be here today. We knew when we came down to late October, anything goes in the weather of Central Ohio.

I want to lift up especially the families of all who have seen your moms and dads out digging in the park since at least March! TO my family – my wife of 33 years and the love of my life, Susan Sitler, you are a saint. Thanks to my children Luke, Daniel, Thalia and Sarah and their beloved ones for your support.

TO Dr. Nancy Loy and her family in support of Tom Worley who has been the backbone of this phenomenal effort.

and to Mary Weaver and family – including the newest addition to the family, Abigail, their first granddaughter.

I want to thank Nancy Jeffrey and her family. Nancy and Tad joined our congregation in 2010. They immediately joined in supporting our church. They,

along with the members of this congregation, had a vision of trees on the west lot. This vision grew into the park we now dedicate. Thanks Nancy. Thanks Tad! Thanks Anne, Abbe, Jeffrey, Sally, Kate, Mike, Henry, Maggie, Betsy, David and Andy and all generations of Jeffreys dating back to the 1800's who have believed in First church and our vision for better world.

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October has been a good month for Washington Gladden. On October 6, Greenlawn Cemetery honored Dr. Gladden with a beautiful plaque and three great trees to go along with an Alice Gladden Hosta planted by the graves of the family. On Tuesday, thanks to Mayor Ginther, Dr. Gladden will be honored as an inductee in the Columbus Hall of Fame, 100 years after his death. Now we dedicate a park with his name and to his honor. I can't think of anyone else who deserves to have a park in his name and honor more than our 7th Senior Minister, The Rev. Dr. Solomon Washington Gladden, born February 11, 1836 in a tiny hamlet called Pottsgrove, PA and he died in his home five blocks from here at 507 East Towne St. July 2, 1918. In his lifetime, he accomplished more good than any one pastor or religious leader I have ever known. I have written so much about him and spoken so often, it is to your advantage that I not get going now. I can't stop if I get started.

This is a park with a purpose. For example, people have asked me to implore you to vote. We have nine days left until election day. Each one of us who is registered must vote. Because of this park, we have a luncheon tomorrow to lift up those who are victims of violence and still find strength to speak out against killing their assailants through the death penalty. This park will call the tens of thousands of drivers who pass by it each day to be aware of social justice in our times. Trees will offer shade in this park, but it will always be a park with a purpose. This park, if you will, has a higher calling. So, let us bless and dedicate this park with a prayer.

Let us pray:

God of all the ages, God of power and majesty, God of the powerless and those whose lives have seen little that was majestic, we turn our praise and thanks to you.

We thank you for the men and women who envisioned and then built this park. We thank you for women and men who believed in this park and invested in their beliefs. We thank you for the hands that have constructed it and made it beautiful.

We call upon your Holy and Glorious Name to bless and to consecrate this holy ground. Bless the trees, the bushes, the plants, the grass. Please the earth that nurtures and sustains the growth of this park. Bless the pathway of justice, the screen of memory, the art that is being dreamed of, designed and planned as we pray. Bless the stones upon which we will walk, rest, march and do justice. Bless this social justice park, O God. May we who come and rest here, also find strength and courage to stand up and do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with you, our God and our maker. Amen.