

## ***From the Minister ... 2012***

**January, 2012**

I recently wrote a letter to my parents expressing my gratitude for many of the things they did & endured during my early years. While these past eight and a half years have been accompanied by markedly less anxiety and turmoil than my youth, I would like to write a similar missive to all of you.

I am very proud of the work we have done together I am also very grateful, for so many things and to so many people. When I arrived, the congregation embraced me, my family, and my style & vision of ministry. Although I did have two years of interim ministry under my belt, the search committee, and the congregation as a whole, was taking a chance on someone who had more to learn. Thank you for being patient and gracious mentors.

Seasoned members have mentored newer members. As a result, our congregation has grown during our time together, both in numbers and in depth. When I arrived here in the summer of 2003, we had about 110 adult members and we are now close to 215. This number does not include the many longstanding friends who have been so vital and gracious with their time and talents. Together, we have seen a number of improvements to the facilities, the organization, the worship life, and the number of groups and activities. Thank you, sincerely, to all who have labored to transform our shared dreams into reality.

Various people have asked whether we might start some new chalice circles and special interest groups in the new year; I regard this is a sign of our vitality and will try to facilitate these endeavors. Each new activity is a reminder that everyone here has the opportunity both to lead and contribute to the character of the congregation – indeed, this congregation, and this movement, are what we make of it. I hope that those of you who are relatively newer members who have not yet taken advantage of these opportunities will do so. I also hope that all of us will share their experiences with their families and friends, and invite them to visit us.

In this new year, may we continue to be faithful stewards of ALUUC's mission, to serve as a beacon of liberal religion in Springfield, and may our fellowship grow in wisdom, strength, graciousness and gratitude.

## **February, 2012**

2012 is shaping up to be —the year of the calendars.!!

I read that several academics have recently proposed a modified calendar that would standardize each year with months of thirty or thirty-one days, replacing the Gregorian Calendar. The authors of the “Hanke-Henry Permanent Calendar” hope that their proposal will be universally adopted by 2017. Not likely, I think. I for one detest this effort to impress uniformity upon time, preferring the variety that arises when particular dates fall on different days of the week in successive years. Personally, I also cringe at the thought of February always having thirty days. No doubt, the disappearance of October 31st altogether will not be popular in certain circles. Another casualty would be the old rhyme that begins “thirty days hath September.” Finally, I flinch when I consider that my birthday would always be on a Wednesday, and that Christmas would always fall on a Sunday. I vote no!

It is worth noting that yet another fundamentalist has predicted a date for the rapture: this time, the target date is 05/27/12. Others continue to speculate that the Mayan calendar heralds doom on 12/21/12. I despise such predictions for several reasons, not the least of which is that it is grounded in superstition and it gives such people an all-too-convenient excuse to turn their backs on the problems that beset the planet.

By the way, if you search for failed prophecies via the internet, you will discover dozens and dozens of examples. But, as one critic has observed, the reputations of false prophets somehow are not diminished among their followers -- when the predicted doom fails to materialize, they simply recast their predictions and try again. Apparently, such people have too much time on their hands. This February, they will have one more full day in fact. Hopefully, there will be those who use that same time more constructively.

## **March , 2011**

This current season is filled with contradictions—storms and sunshine. Still, experience instills confidence that winter is passing. Although the signs of winter still dominate the landscape, there are tufts of green sprouting here and there. The seasons continue to move. So too do the generations: I have been leading a class of five youth, introducing them to our history and traditions. Teaching this class is a privilege and a necessity. As Antoine de St. Exupery wrote, “[O]ne [person] hands down and another takes up the heritage of mind and heart, laughter and tears, musings and deeds.” If our children do not become acquainted with our heritage, there is a risk they will drift that they will away, figuratively as well as spirituality. Should that happen, we will languish as a

movement. The bond between generations is not only precious, but vital, for all concerned. Unlike other tradition, this bond is not rooted in memorization. I am mindful of the sage advice of William Ellery Channing, who wrote: “The great end of religious instruction is not to stamp our minds upon the young, but to stir up their own. Not to make them see with our eyes, but to look inquiringly and steadily with their own.” We must offer them a compass, not a roadmap.

This offer poses a challenge, for all concerned. Unlike other religious traditions, we emphasize becoming rather than memorizing. Becoming means our youth will be guided by our beliefs and values, but they will also be encouraged to form their own—a process which may require pushing against and even rejecting their elders’ convictions.

The youth who complete the course will be awarded a “Religion in Life” medal. I hope, though, that they will one day experience, not religion in life—life, that is, interspersed with mere moments of religious transcendence—but religion as life—life which incarnates their religious experience in thought and action. The day will come when these young people are called upon not only to lead auctions and hold pledge drives but, more importantly, to lead others in worship and to give public witness to their values. I trust that we will all be good and gracious guides, offering them the best we have and making room for them when their time inevitably arrives. I likewise trust they will enthusiastically embrace the opportunities and challenges they will inherit.

## **April , 2012**

*No Article*

## **May, 2012**

As May arrives, I look forward to many sprays of flowers assured by the showers of April. Likewise, I am mindful that the current leaders of ALUUC look forward to the fruition of the seeds planted during the past few seasons: our lay leaders have been able, dedicated gardeners of the spirit and of the institution. Hopefully, we all appreciate the sustained and colorful burst of activities, energy, and enthusiasm within the congregation which result from our members’ skill and commitment.

During the summer—which will be here before you know it—there is usually a lull in energy in some quarters. This is a natural rhythm. I look forward to reflecting on the roads we have thus traveled together and planning for the coming liturgical year.

There is much upon which to reflect. By the time you receive this, I will have celebrated the anniversary of my installation at ALUUC way back in 2003; all together, I have nearly eleven years of professional ministry under my belt—a happy milestone, if not incredible! Soon, I will be starting the beginning of my tenth year of service here. I am thrilled with the plethora of activities and the growth of the congregation since my arrival.

I hope and trust that new leaders will continue to come to the fore and that we shall continue to welcome new members. Together, let us dedicate ourselves anew to the flowering of Liberal Religion here in Central Illinois.

## **June, 2012**

As more than a few people have requested a copy of the “Letter to Dr. Laura” that I included in my remarks on May 27th, I am including the text here. As I mentioned, this has been circulated on the Internet for about a decade already. Enjoy!

*“For those of you that are not following the recent controversy that has to do with Laura Schlessinger: she is a radio personality who dispenses advice to people who call in to her radio show. Paramount Television Group is currently producing a “Dr. Laura” television show. Recently she has become a convert to Judaism, and now she is Ba'al T'shuvah. Recently, she has made some statements about homosexuals that have caused the Canadian anti-hate laws to censure her... The following is an open letter to Dr. Laura which was posted on the internet...”*

Dear Dr. Laura, Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the specific laws and how to best follow them.

a) When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord (Lev 1:9). The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

b) I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

c) I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (Lev 15:19-24). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

d) Lev. 25:44 states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

e) I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?

f) A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an Abomination (Lev 11:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?

g) Lev 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

h) Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev 19:27. How should they die?

i) I know from Lev 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

j) My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? (Lev 24:10-16) Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your devoted disciple and adoring fan.”

**July, 2012** *not found \*\**

**August, 2012** *No article - on vacation*

**September, 2012** *not found\*\**

## **October, 2012**

*Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower. - Albert Camus*

The above quote was cited in *Mutts*, a comic strip created by Patrick McDonnell. The tenor of *Mutts* is often reminiscent of *Peanuts* by Charles Schultz, infusing a dose of wisdom that is wrapped in tender humor. Celeste and I both read this strip every morning.

This quote intrigued me. I was delighted not only by the source of the quote, but more so by the image and the sentiment. Autumn *is* a second spring – a time of transitions and re-birth. When every leaf is a flower – how true; all those leaves which had been so alike now dazzle in their respective crowns. All in all, a succinct reminder to savor the cool texture of the air and to marvel at the rich colors. Wisdom for the ages, wisdom for all ages.

As I have admitted before, Autumn is my favorite season, the three months of the year when I generally feel most alive. Perhaps it is because I have long associated the fall with the abrupt resumption of activity following the summer hiatus.

Likewise, the pace of our congregation's interior life surges forward in new directions with the fall. Soon we will witness the Treasure No Trash sale, circle suppers, covenant groups, religious education for adults as well as for children, potlucks, events and meetings. Those who were previously "un-churched" may well marvel at the pace of ALUUC as we move into the liturgical year in earnest.

I trust that all newer members know that they are welcome to participate fully in these events, and to volunteer your time, talent and resources as you are able. It is by participating that we get to know you better and vice versa. It is by participating that we all empower this community and enliven this tradition... and in the process, we experience a second spring, and we recognize our lives as the vibrant flowers that they are.

## **November, 2012**

As many of you are aware, the admixture of politics and religion is volatile and controversial. The current political season has seen a few high ranking religious leaders publicly share their endorsements. This in itself does not shock me. What troubled me about the statements from Bishop Paprocki of Springfield was his comment that voting for one particular party will "place the eternal salvation of one's soul in serious jeopardy." While such rhetoric is less direct than that employed by the Westboro Baptist Church, I regard it as only a matter of degree.

I submitted a response to the Bishop to the Illinois Times and a slightly shorter version to the State Journal-Register. Both papers published my letter. Given the response generated by other letters on this topic, I was surprised that there were no on-line comments attacking my letter on their respective websites. Here is the full version of what I submitted:

*As a former Catholic, I was not surprised by Bishop Paprocki's recent public statements. In my youth, I heard similar admonishments from the pulpit. Indeed, that is one of the reasons why I left Catholicism. In hindsight, I owe that tradition much, for Catholics taught me to love like a Universalist, and Jesuits taught me to think like a Unitarian.*

*After ordination, I have occasionally been called to speak out on social issues. I for one do not ever endorse any particular candidates or party; such is generally considered "beyond the Pale." Still, I have come to appreciate the preachers' proverb that whenever one discusses contemporary issues from the pulpit, should a member agree with the views expressed, he/ she will describe the talk as "spiritual," yet when a listener disagrees, he/she is apt to respond that the preacher has crossed the line into politics.*

*That said, I must take issue with his assertion that sexual orientation and the freedom to make reproductive choices are "intrinsic evils." I would remind your readers that other faith traditions defend different conclusions. For example, UUs welcome people regardless of their sexual orientation. We believe that reproductive choices, including birth control, are best made by the women affected and their doctors. We believe that men and women alike should be ordained. We believe that deeds, not creeds, define what it means to be authentically religious. We believe that freedom and democracy are essential to the religious life; which is to say that people should govern their religious communities and be free to prove all things and hold fast to that which is true.*

## **December, 2012**

A gaggle of holidays converge in December, practically upon one another's heels. Depending on one's faith tradition, one may celebrate Yule, Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanzaa, and New Year's Eve. These of course are just the tip of the proverbial icicle. Others celebrate Diwali (Hindu festival of Lights), Rohatsu (Buddha Day), or Human Rights Day. In most of these examples, these occasions began as Holy Days, times to reflect upon, and celebrate, the interconnectedness of the Holy and the Profane.

Most of us probably recognize a creative tension—a dualism, actually—that permeates what is known and imagined in our lives and expectations. Perhaps this comes to the forefront at this time of the year, when the shadows are long and the yearning for lights is intense. We are well aware of the demands made on us, especially by the larger

consumer culture, and we reminisce about what we imagine were “simpler times.” I suspect that if we could query past generations, they would confess a nostalgia for the same—and so it would go, back to the origins of our species, would it not? And yes, is it not possible that we are living in what others will one day regard as a “Golden Age”? There will always be those who can discern the gilded aspects of one era or another, and yet the basic impulse remains. What does that say about humanity and how we mark our seasons upon this earth? I lift up the eternal blessing and desire for “Peace on Earth.” I do not believe that such can ever manifest itself into being, but I do believe that we can participate in the larger effort to see it realized. May it be so. Thus, regardless of the holy days that speak to you, may this season be one of joy—and, may peace on Earth be a bit closer to reality.