



MINISTER'S SLANT -

The beginning is the most important part of the work. — Plato

For a few summers, I served as a guide at Anderson Japanese Garden in Rockford. In those days, the main garden entrance was through the Wisteria Gate, a traditional Japanese structure of bamboo held together with twine where the pieces crossed. At its roots, the wisteria vine was several inches in diameter, narrowing as it grew over the canopy into thin tendrils laden with panicles of lavender flowers. Standing before the gate, we guides advised people that, traditionally in Japan, a gate was thought of as an entrance into another reality, another way of being, that they could leave their worries and distractions behind, and enter the gate empty and ready to receive the blessings of the garden.

This is not too far removed from the original intent of fifteenth century tea house gardens. Then, guests walked circuitous paths to reach the tea house. All along the way were artistically placed stones, trees, grasses, lanterns, ponds with slowly moving koi fish, and several more gates to pass through — all calculated to slow the travelers down and give them time to contemplate the sublime beauty of the place, to absorb the serenity, to dissolve anger and fear, to uplift their spirits. When the guests came to the tea house at last, they divested themselves of any weapons before removing their shoes to bow to their host and enter the tea house. Ah, such a fitting way to enter the new year, even to greet each new day — to slow down, let go, bow in reverence and gratitude to the One who created the sublime garden, and as the song in our hymnal advises, "Enter, Rejoice, and Come In!"

January was supposedly named for Janus, the Roman God whose images show him facing in two directions, forward and behind in space, or toward the past and the future in time. He is the spirit of doorways and gateways, passages from one state of being into another — the precise moment of personal transformation. So, I think of January as my wisteria gate into tomorrow. I wish I could show you the wisteria, waiting for a new season to bloom; but the Gate was finally undermined by the weight of the growing vine, and taken down. Yet, this too, is a meditation on how life and time outrun all our ideas about them, how what is alive and sacred undermines and escapes all the structures of the mind we try to harness it to; it will not be contained in any arrangement of words, any book, even any thought. It is humbling and refreshing to realize that. Once a year in January is not too often to put ourselves in the way of these blessings. I wish you safe passage through all gates!

Let go; go on,
Armida

Board Report

The church welcomed three new members in December. Judy Hedden and Michael Staver joined on the 10th, and Steve Fleming joined on the 17th. If you haven't already, please congratulate our newest members. The Christmas Eve Service theme of "Out of the Stars: Birth of Everything" was very informative and the music was again great. Thanks to Armida and all the participants. The board is looking for a place to hold a satellite service in the Freeport area. We would like feedback and help with publicity on the idea from friends or members from Freeport. Please contact Armida if you can help. Thanks to everyone that bought a present, contributed money, and helped wrap presents for the needy family in the Stockton area. We helped a large family of 5 children and collected \$100. towards a Sullivan's gift card. Thanks to Randy and Sylvia Downing for organizing the poinsettias and Jeanie McKewan for watering them. Please feel free to take yours home after the holidays. On a sad note Patsy Kopper passed away on Nov. 20th and Beulah Townsend on Nov. 26th.

CHURCH ANNUAL MEETING AND POTLUCK

Our annual meeting and potluck will be held January 14th immediately after the Church service in the Patterson room. Doug and Laura Dufford have volunteered to provide a cooked turkey for the occasion. Bring a side dish to pass if you want. We will hear financial reports, minister's report, committee and board reports. A budget for 2018 will be presented, discussed, and approved. Comments, new business, and ideas from the audience would be accepted. Election of officers for the coming year will be voted on. Please plan on attending and participating for the future of the Stockton U.U. Church

Church Cancellation Protocol

Church services and other Church related events have to be canceled from time to time because of weather emergencies or other unforeseen situations. It's the Co-Moderators responsibility to call off any Church function where we can't have a scheduled service of any type. For future reference, the following procedure will be in place and these television stations will be contacted. From the Quad Cities 8-WQAD 6-KWQC 4-WHBF . From Rockford 23-WIFR 17-WTVO 13-WREX . We will also will send out an e-mail for the people on that list. The safety of our members and friends is paramount so use good judgment when the roads become unsafe for travel. Feel free to contact the Co-Moderators also with advice or questions. Mark Haman (815-777-0493) Ted Davenport (815-238-8781)

News and Notes

The New Year is an opportune time for reflection, releasing, visioning and setting intentions. Sunday, January 7, 1:30-4:30 pm at Woodbine Bend Golf Course, "Vision for 2018 Workshop" with Kate Miller. We will utilize ~ Burning Bowl Ritual for clearing what no longer serves; Guided Contemplative Meditation connecting with divine guidance; Creative expression through journaling, vision boards, intention cards, prayer flags; Interactive visualization practice of future pulling. Come Play. Cost \$30. For information and to register call Kate at 847-204-9350.

FACC NEWS

In January we will start another year of our support for FACC--the Freeport Area Church Cooperative. This coalition of almost 30 area churches, headquartered in a former Lutheran school in downtown Freeport, serves the homeless and the needy all year. While our main contribution is monthly deliveries of toiletries and household necessities (and we are the only church doing this--other churches provide canned goods, etc.) for local families, their facilities also include accommodations for homeless men and women, and housing for veterans, as well as social services for longer term solutions. Renee Dieschbourg, (847-894-5270) will be the new coordinator of volunteers, and it would be nice if we could fill the 2018 schedule with your calls to her to volunteer without her needing to ask a single member first! Most months are still open. It is an interesting and fun experience to collect and/or purchase the necessary items and to deliver them (just one time in the whole year!) to the FACC location in Freeport. And, of course, you ALL need to continue your contributions of everything from toothpaste to toilet paper and cash! ~ Nanette Mosher

NEW MEMBERS



Michael Staver and Judy Hedden join the church on December 10. Welcome!

WHAT HAVE WE DONE

Have you ever heard the complaint, "But, the church doesn't DO anything!" To which, in future, you might reply, "Oh, doesn't it? Our church contributes half our cash offering to local charities, AND it inspires, encourages and abets the people who give to these important causes and issues. Here is the list of groups that our members support, taken November 26, 2017, and copied here with some doubt about my spelling!

DOMESTIC AND CARE ISSUES

*Planned Parenthood - 4
Women's Empowerment
NARAL
Doctors Without Borders 2
Organic Consumer Association
People with Disabilities
Angelic Organics Learning Center
Slow Food
The Kitchen Community, Chicago
Food Integrity
Food Pantries
Alzheimer's Association
Hospice
Grief Support
Santa Clara Food Bank*

ANIMAL RIGHTS

Marine Mammal Canter

ART AND INFORMATION

*Freeport Art Museum
Galena Center for the Arts 2
Galena Performing Arts Festival
Public Radio and TV WNJJ*

CONSERVATION AND LAND ISSUES

*Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation 2
Second Harvest
Public Lands of San Juan County, CO
The Prairie Enthusiasts
Natural Land Institute
The Wild Ones
Quan/Springs Permaculture*

LOCAL CHARITIES and GROUPS

*UU Church Stockton - 6
— with money, time, and encouragement
Sleezer Home in Freeport
NW IL GSA Girl Scouts
United Way
Local Fire Department and EMT's
Salvation Army
Museums
Galena Historical Society
Young Farmers
Also, 1st Congregational Church of Silverton, CO
Public Library of Silverton, CO, when I'm there.*

NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CONCERNS

*Disabled American Veterans
International Rescue Committee
ACLU - 4
Greenpeace
Unicef
Democratic Party 3
Gun Control — Gabby Gifford's group
Yogoda Satsang Society of India
Pram Rawat Foundation
La Via Compesina
World Peace and Harmony
Sierra Club
Greenpeace
Red Cross*

And, in general, we work for justice, food for all, care of land, peace, and — needing less, finding balance, being kind, being generous.

Touchstones theme for January - Justice

Please join us on Sunday, January 14 for the Touchstones Adult Discussion Group. We'll meet at 9:15 a.m. in the RE area. This group is open to anyone interested in some stimulating, thought provoking conversations. No need to sign-up, just show-up! The material that will be discussed can be found on line at <http://www.uuchurchofstockton.org/touchstones.html>. If you have a chance, please look over the discussion material. We're pretty loose, so we'll be happy to have your thoughts whether you've read the material or not. Please consider joining us! ~ *Laura Dufford*

A reminder to the Galena/West end group – next meeting is Thursday, January 18 at 11:30 at E-Town. ~ *Sheila Haman*

WHY SILENCE? (An introduction to Sunday, January 28)

At the last meeting of the Worship Committee, Jeanie and I agreed that a lot of us, hopefully most of us, would enjoy and benefit from shared silence, which has inspired and comforted many people. Friends, or Quakers, have met in silent meetings for years, and they know how to just BE together. We could learn from them. Below is an excerpt from an article by Marsha D Holliday from the Friends General Conference in 2000. Are you surprised by the similarity to UU values?

If you have never before attended an un-programmed Friends (Quaker) meeting for worship, your first meeting may surprise you. While all Quakers meet in worship to hear more clearly God's "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12), Friends in the un-programmed Quaker tradition base our worship entirely on expectant waiting. We take the Psalmist's advice literally: "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

We meet in plain, unadorned rooms because we have found that, in such places, we are less distracted from hearing that still small voice. There are no pulpits in our meeting rooms because we minister to each other. Our benches or chairs face each other because we are all equal before God. We have no prearranged prayers, readings, sermons, hymns, or musical orchestrations because we wait for God's leadings (guidance and direction) and power in our lives.

During worship, a message may come to us. Friends have found that messages may be for our personal reflection or for sharing on another occasion. Or they may be a leading to stand and speak. Friends value spoken messages that come from the heart and are prompted by the Spirit, and we also value the silence we share together. Following a spoken message, we return to the silence to examine ourselves in the Light of that message. Meeting for worship ends when one Friend, designated in advance, shakes hands with his or her neighbors. Then everyone shakes hands.

No two meetings are ever the same. Like our style of worship, Quaker theology also differs from other religions. Because creeds could never fully represent all revelation and could limit or confine our perceptions of truth, Friends write no creeds. Instead, we write queries (probing questions) that help us reflect on our beliefs and actions; and yearly meetings, which are regional organizations of local congregations (known as monthly meetings), record our common values and experiences in manuals entitled Faith and Practice.

Without creeds, Friends have become diverse in our beliefs about God. Nonetheless, Friends' common experience of God's presence within and among us has led us to realize that there is that of God, or something of the Divine, in everyone. This realization is central to Quakerism. It is confirmed in testimonies in the Bible and referred to by Friends with such terms as "the Christ Within," "the Inward Light," and "the Seed of Truth." As Friends have attempted to respond to that of God within, some common values have arisen that unite us. Among them, Friends value life as sacred. Because we recognize that there is that of God in everyone, Friends try to avoid violence. We have found that when we hurt others, we also harm ourselves and deny that of God in us. With God's guidance, we try, instead, to find nonviolent solutions to conflicts and differences and to help others through service, the promotion of social and economic justice, kindness in daily living, and the support of each other's search for that of God within.

CALENDAR- January 2018

Sunday, January 7 10:30 a.m. Mark Haman will be leading the service entitled "Justice from Several Perspectives"

Monday, January 8, 5:00 p.m. Board Meets at church

Wednesday, January 10, 10:00 a.m. Stockton Ministers (including yours) meet at Massbach Lutheran Church.

Thursday, January 11, Noon, Worship Committee meets at E Town. New members welcome.

Sunday, January 14, 10:30 a.m. *Through These Doors*. . . being a reflection by Rev. Armida (who has some strong opinions on the topic,) on the uses and abuses of "church."

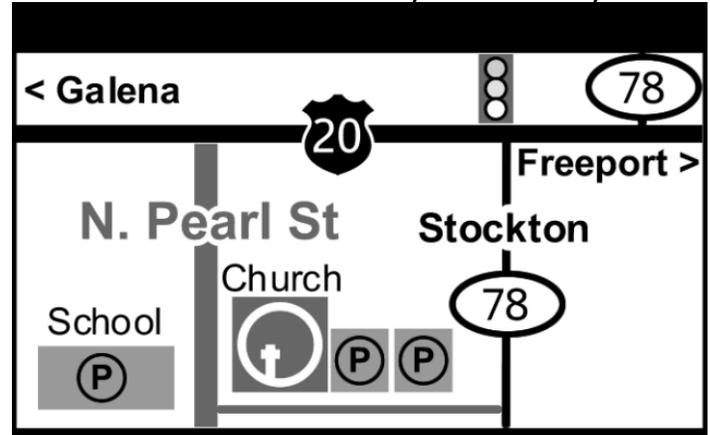
Before the service: 9:15 a.m. Touchstones!
Everyone welcome. After the service, Our Annual Meeting, followed by brunch.

Sunday, January 21, 10:30 a.m. Alice Ericksen will be leading the service on Justice.

Sunday, January 28, 10:30 a.m. The Rev. and Jeanie McKewan will invoke the silence as a spiritual practice, with a few choice words and. . . well, practice! Silence is a technique that the devout and the doubting alike can use. It is both like and unlike prayer, which usually is address somewhere to some purpose. The silence just IS, and requires no recipient and no result. There will be Religious Education for children.

CHURCH INFORMATION

219 N PEARL STREET, STOCKTON, IL



Wheel chair parking and elevator access is available from the rear parking lot.
 Sunday Services at 10:30 AM
 Rev. Armida Alexander
 UUChurchOfStockton.org
 Facebook.com/UUChurchOfStockton
 uustockton@gmail.com