



MINISTER'S REMARKS

Considering Bell Towers

The highest point in any town or village was once occupied by the church bell tower, the seat of spiritual power. But no longer. Now the highest point is likely to be a bank or office high-rise, the seat of economic power. Maybe that is for the best. Bell towers are ambiguous additions to a church. They point upward, toward transcendence, and like Babel's fabled ziggurat, they invite trouble -- lightning and windstorms damage them; they are hazardous to paint or repair. And, they collect things. Still, they have provided some comic relief amid the serious business of religion. First Unitarian Universalist in Chicago became home to a colony of Peregrine falcons who littered the sidewalks with the remains of their dinners -- fur, feathers, beaks, and bones. This sight quite unnerved some visitors, but it inspired theological reflection among the passing students on their way to Meadville (the UU Theological School) or the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Another church had a roof-top bell tower that had housed generation upon generation of pigeons. When the weakened tower floor threatened to shower the congregation with more than blessings, a group of masked men climbed the narrow ladder and removed nine truck-loads of hazardous waste. Thereafter, the bell rang more resonantly and more often! Though they point to the heavens, bell towers also point out human folly and pretension. They remind us that we do not know precisely where divinity resides. Not up, or if up, then not only up! They remind us that we do not control the lightning, nor the winds, nor the flight of wings. And to be so reminded is good for the soul.

Despite their lofty splendor, the towers preach humility. **Our church has the best tower story.** The founders and builders of our 1899 church made a promise to the near neighbor and owner of the lot the church was built on. He stated emphatically that he heard bells from all over town, and he would appreciate not hearing one so close to his home. So the church was built, as most were in those days, **with** a bell tower. But no bell was installed in it -- ever. The tower has remained open and empty -- seemingly useless. But now, ironically, it is a striking symbol of liberal religion, and it is strangely congruent with our modern attitude toward theology -- that all statements about God tend to be paradoxical, metaphorical, poetic or nonsensical. In other words, any God worth talking about cannot be talked about! God is altogether beyond the power of language to encompass, so the most honest approach is to leave the category of the divine empty, ready to be filled with all we see.

A poet/artist said, "Radiance is the nature of the divine!" -- Light! And scripture describes the Holy as ruach, pneuma, or breath -- Wind! Our bell tower is a meditation -- empty -- open to Light and Wind, it embraces silence. Our tower does not proclaim a call to worship nor announce the time. It points beyond itself; it does not proclaim, yet says all that needs to be said, that can be said. May we strive to be so eloquent!

— Rev. Armida Alexander

(815)990-8200 or revinreso6@yahoo.com

Co-Moderator's Report

As the Board of Trustees looks to March, we welcome our new Financial Secretary, Randy Downing and new Steward, Anastasia Aldridge.

At the February meeting we looked at three big projects for the near future. We heard from Doug and Linda Weeder on the importance of having Long Range Planning for our church (brought up at the Annual Meeting). They will be planning a meeting soon with Mark and Anastasia and one or two members at large. If you're interested, talk to Doug or Linda. This is important for the long-term health of our church.

Anastasia and Mark are still fine-tuning the member survey which the Board will conduct. We feel it's very important to re-energize the membership and increase Sunday attendance. Start thinking about any changes you'd like to see and how you can help. When one of us on the Board calls, we want to know what you think!

As you may know, we have contracted with Rockford for our newsletter, website, and miscellaneous administrative services, but we are now looking to become more self-sufficient. More on this in the future.

As always, we're eager to hear your thoughts.
church!

See you in

Mark Haman, Co-Moderator

Proposed Budget 2017

Income

Contributions Plate	\$3,000.00
Unrestricted Gifts	\$2,000.00
Fund Transfer	\$6,000.00
Fun Raising	\$3,500.00
Pledge Income	<u>\$60,500.00</u>
Total Income	\$75,000.00

Expenses

Committees	\$2,500.00
Service Partners	\$1,500.00
UUA/MDWT	\$3,960.00
Dues	\$40.00
Administration	\$14,000.00
Maintenance B&G	\$15,500.00
Guest Ministers	\$4,500.00
Minister (TCM)	<u>\$33,000.00</u>
Total Income	\$75,000.00

WORSHIP COMMITTEE NEWS

Hope to See You in Church This Month

Just to let you know vibrant services continue to inspire us every Sunday. And March will be more of the same. Because Rev. Armida works half-time here in Stockton, she preaches for us only two Sundays per month. We on the Worship Committee are charged with planning the other two Sunday services. This month two of our members will lead these services.

Sunday, March 5th, 10:30 a.m. **Dan Metzger** will help us "Sing Our Way Home." Come enjoy our resident troubadour and the music! Mark Haman, service leader(SL); Mel Parker, musician (M).

Sunday, March 12th, 10:30 a.m. *Our True Names*, How does our sense of ourselves — our identity — develop over time? Rev. Armida in the pulpit, telling the Irish legend of *The Selkie*. Alice Ericksen SL, Joan Harmet, M.

Sunday, March 19th, 10:30 a.m. **Alice Ericksen** will reflect on the meaning of Easter and the Spring Equinox in our UU faith tradition. Anastasia Aldridge SL, Sally Fischer, M.

Sunday March 19th, Before Church, at 9:15 a.m. Adult Exploration with Armida — Genogram, the Family Map. Draw your family tree and discover stories, traits and traditions, and especially the family strengths.

Sunday, March 26th, 10:30 a.m. ***What Fools These Mortals Be*** in honor of April Fool's Day, Armida takes a cursory look at the usefulness of foolishness. Lee Anderson, M.

All of these services keep the church experience relevant in our lives. Be sure to be there to share the inspiration.

CHURCH NEWS



Many thanks to everyone who continues to support the Freeport Area Church Cooperative with donations of personal items and toilet paper. Though our donations have been increasingly generous the FACC always runs out of these all-important items quickly as there is great need in our community. Please continue to give generously and know how much our contributions are appreciated!

FAR-DREAMING CHURCH: The Board has appointed several members to a Long Range Planning Committee. The committee will hold an organizational meeting in early March. Look for ways in which the entire congregation will be involved in LOOKING FORWARD! Do you want to help with this creative and important work? Just contact Doug Weeder.

SOUL MATTER DISCUSSION GROUP: The Stockton Soul Matters Discussion Group will meet on Sunday, March 19th at 9:15. The topics have been interesting and discussions have been great. Please join us for coffee and discussion in the R.E. area. **Everyone is welcome!!** If you have a moment, read over the Soul Matters information at the end of this newsletter for March's discussion topic. Hope to see you there!

NEW CHURCH DIRECTORIES: Our new church directories are finally available! Please pick up your directory in the Patterson Room. If you need more than one copy, we do have some available, but would appreciate a small donation to help cover the cost. If there are any errors in the entries, please let us know.

- Sheila Haman

Member Contact Information Change: Jean Logemann has a new phone number. It is [608-325-1416](tel:608-325-1416).

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

ATTENTION: THE NEWSLETTER DEADLINE WILL ALWAYS BE THE 20TH OF THE MONTH AT 5 P.M. PLEASE GET YOUR NOTICES AND ARTICLES TO TED (TKDAVENPORT@HOTMAIL.COM) OR MARK AND SHEILA (HAMAN@ATT.NET).

CHURCH NEWS, CONTINUED.

First Ladies Speak at UU Church of Stockton!



Presidents' Day weekend brought some very special guests to our Sunday service. We heard the personal stories of three First Ladies: Eleanor Roosevelt (Nancy Schuldt), Rosalynn Carter (Sheila Haman), and Michelle Obama (Leslie Hawley). Alice Ericksen, from the Worship Committee, led this inspirational service.

STOCKTON FOOD PANTRY REVERSE OFFERING will begin March 26th. The Stockton Ministerial Association has taken responsibility for collecting specific items for the Food Pantry. We will hold a drawing on Sunday, March 26th so that what you bring is exactly what the Pantry needs. Return items to church to be delivered.

News From The Green Team

Just a reminder that we still have a lot of great tasting coffee and chocolate for sale in the Patterson room. If you purchased some in the past and left a check in the "Payment Jar" and wondered why your check has not cleared, it was because your newly elected Financial Secretary (me) was slow in removing and depositing the contents of the jar. We will do better going forward.

For the past maybe half-dozen years, our church has had a vegetable and flower garden in the Community Garden Plots located on Front Ave., directly in front of the Brewster Cheese Factory. Most all of the produce grown in this garden has been donated to the Stockton Nursing Home. The church member who has done most of the grunt work (with quite a bit of help) has decided it is time to hang up his hoe. So, we need a volunteer to take over this project, or we will have to give our garden plot to some other individual or group. If you enjoy gardening, doing it in a community plot is fun. You get to compare your beans with your neighbor's beans, your tomatoes with hers, etc. It is a social thing besides just growing produce. A fringe benefit to the person taking on this project is that there is always enough for you to take some home for your family to enjoy. Anyone interested, please contact Laura Dufford or me. Thanks.

— Randy Downing

CHURCH CANCELLATION PROTOCOL

With winter just around the corner, it's time we advise everyone on the policy for cancelling church. It's the co-moderator's responsibility to call off any church function in the event of bad weather or any unforeseen situation where we can't have a scheduled service of any type. For future reference, this 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. The safety of our members and friends is paramount, so use good judgement when the roads become unsafe for travel. Feel free to contact the co-moderators with advise or questions. Mark Haman (815)777-0493 and Ted Davenport (815)238-8781

Soul Matters/Spirit Journey March 2017

What Does It Mean To Be A Community of Risk?

To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger.

~James Baldwin

Risk is usually associated with the dare devils and thrill seekers. The real danger, we're told, is a life of boredom. The battle is between the bland and the bold.

Yet, as James Baldwin reminds us, it's not quite that simple. He places commitment, not thrills, at the center of the game. For him, the ones to be admired are not so much the dare devils as the dedicated ones. And that Holy Grail? Well, he suggests, maybe it's not "the exciting life" as we've been told. Maybe it's the faithful life.

And that turns everything wonderfully on its head.

From this perspective, the important question about risk (and about life) is not "Are you willing to jump off?" but "Are you willing to jump in?" Not "Are you willing to put yourself in danger?" but "Are you willing to give yourself to something bigger?" Not "Will you be daring?" but "Will you stay true?"

And the message changes too. Suddenly, it's not "Run to what's thrilling!" but "Don't run away!"

It's all about remembering not to let the thrilling trump the faithful. As exciting as roller coasters and jumping out of planes might be, let's remember to remind each other that the most deeply rewarding risks are the ones that involve jumping into causes and putting our hearts in the hands of others.

Spiritual Exercises

Option A -- Risk Letting Your Counter-Cultural Self Loose

Each of us have counter-cultural commitments that we don't lean into as fully as we wish. Often this has to do with a lack of courage. It's risky to be labeled "a radical." And so we downplay our pacifism. We don't make a big deal out of our veganism. In order not to be seen as the "weird parents," we've given up on those "silly" efforts to limit TV, put phones away at dinner, or just not buy cable at all. Our closest friends don't really understand what UUism is because we don't want people to think we're "evangelical." We deeply believe in racial reparations but we rarely mention it because the backlash leaves us not only angry but with an even more devastating sense of mourning and isolation.

It's not simple. And it's never easy. But not letting our counter-cultural self loose comes at a cost. So this month take the risk of letting it all hang out, or hang out to the degree that feels right to you.

Come to your group ready to talk about the cost of "letting loose," but our hope is that you also can come with a story of how the gift so out-weighed the price.

Option B -- Resist Standing Up and Risk Sitting Down

"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."

- Winston Churchill

Winston Churchill's words are indeed a celebration of the "quieter" acts of courage. Yes, the more assertive risks get most of the attention: speaking up, defending, pushing back, demanding your voice be heard. And yet, sometimes that instinct to "let them have it" isn't the brave thing to do; it's just the easiest. There are times when what's most needed is the risk of letting go of control and just sitting with unknowing.

And so, maybe a bit more space it needed. Maybe it would do us some good to make some room for a "spiritual time out" before we leap into the louder acts of bravery. Maybe it's good to risk "letting a little more in" before we "let them have it."

And so, here's what this spiritual assignment invites us to do:

Find three opportunities to "sit down and listen"

when your first instinct is to "stand up and speak."

Yes, that's NOT going to be easy. But it will be worth the risk!

Come to your group ready to share not only what it was like to try to listen better, but also (and maybe more importantly) what it was like to better monitor (and understand) your instinct to stand up and speak.

Session Plan

Chalice Lighting

5 min

When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown-up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability. To be alive is to be vulnerable. ~ Madeleine L'Engle

General Check-In

20min

Question: What does being part of a "community of risk" mean for you and your daily living?

Exercise -- Each person share their responses. After sharing, discussion.

20min

Conversation -- a question that "grabs" you, and answer.

40 min

Are your commitments deep and big enough to put you in danger? (To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. ~ James Baldwin)

Who in your life needs their vulnerability affirmed? Who near you is taking a risk and needs reminding that others are watching with admiration and awe? Who needs help seeing that they aren't simply exposed, but radiant?

("What makes you vulnerable, makes you beautiful." – Brené Brown)

How breakable is that heart of yours? Is it more "carefully wrapped" than you noticed? What one small risk this month might help it get some "air"? ("Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to keep it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable." - C.S. Lewis)

How might it hurt less if you reminded yourself you picked well? If you took the time to remember that you've "found one worth suffering for"? (The truth is, everyone is going to hurt you. You just got to find the ones worth suffering for." ~ Bob Marley).

Have the adventures gotten a bit out of hand? Is there a bit too much "living bold" going on for you right now? Might it be time to take the risk of turning some adventures down? What about the risks of letting go? What about the boldness of taking a pass?

Sometimes deciding to walk away from the cliff is as courageous and bold as jumping off.

Are you (or someone you love) being reckless and calling it "freedom"? ("We mistook violence for passion, indolence for leisure, and thought recklessness was freedom." – Toni Morrison)

Check-Out -- What's your take-away about "risk"? Gratitude for this time?

5 min

Closing Words:

The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing. He or she may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he or she simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love -- live. Only a person who risks is free. ~ Janet Rand

CALENDAR – MARCH 2017

Sunday, March 5th, 10:30 a.m. Dan Metzger

Sing Our Way Home.

Tuesday, March 7, 3:30 p.m. Worship Committee meets at the Welcome Inn, Elisabeth, IL

Sunday, March 12, 10:30 a.m. *Our True Names*, an exploration of identity. Story: *The Selkie*, an Irish tale — Rev. Armida

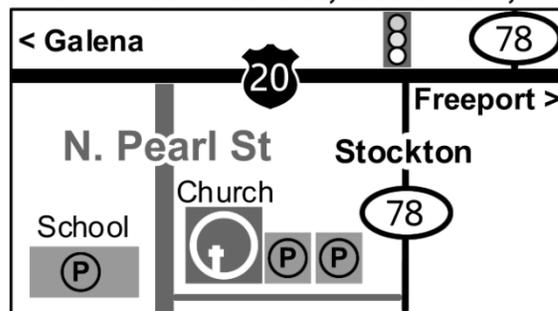
Monday, March 13, 6:00 p.m. Board in the Patterson Room.

Sunday, March 19th, 10:30 a.m. **Alice Ericksen** — Easter and the Spring Equinox. **Before Church, at 9:15 a.m.** Adult Exploration with Armida — Genogram, the Family Map.

Sunday, March 26th, 10:30 a.m. *What Fools These Mortals Be* in honor of Arpil Fool's Day, Rev. A.

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

CHILD CARE EVERY SUNDAY AT 10:30 AM

REV. ARMIDA ALEXANDER, MINISTER

UUCHURCHOFSOCKTON.ORG



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

219 N PEARL ST, STOCKTON, IL 61085