

## *The Question Box*

*A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE*

*Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga*

*June 12, 2011*

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Good morning and welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Jeff Briere and I am the minister of this church. Let's begin with a rousing and joyful hymn today; please join me in singing Hymn 361, "Enter, Rejoice and Come In."

**HYMN 361**, Enter, Rejoice and Come In

### **GREETINGS**

**ERIC. Thanks so much** for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. And thank you so much for helping to create a reverent atmosphere during *Connections*.

If you have a particular **joy or sorrow** or something you'd like added

to the prayer of the people, please clearly write it on an index card and drop it in the basket back there. You may sign it or not, as you wish.

It was apparent at the annual meeting that people wanted to talk. Understanding that the annual meeting is not the place for a free-range discussion, Diane Reed suggested **an open mike session**. And so we'll do that right after the service. Anyone who wishes to talk about the church or anything to do with it is welcome to attend this session.

Please check out **the complete listing of announcements** included with the bulletin. The best way to find out what's happening around here is to sign up for a weekly e-mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office.

This morning we are happy to welcome Joseph Akins to our service. He brings his own compositions for the service music.

**PRELUDE:** Masterpeace

### **LIGHTING THE CHALICE**

Roseanne Copeland and Helen Solomon, would you light our chalice, please? To accompany the lighting of our chalice this morning, I have words from Anne Hillman. Please read with me.

We look with uncertainty  
Beyond the old choices for  
Clear-cut answers  
To a softer, more permeable aliveness  
Which is every moment  
At the brink of death;  
For something new is being born in us  
If we but let it.  
We stand at a new doorway,

Awaiting that which comes  
Daring to be human creatures.  
Vulnerable to the beauty of existence.  
Learning to love.

### **STORY: Ignorance and Cell Phones**

Do you know about the Question Box? Here it is. It's been out in the fellowship area for a few weeks, and two children put questions into it. Here's the first one.

#### **Why won't my parents let me have a cell phone?**

There are many reasons that parents might not want their child to have a cell phone. As many reasons as parents. It could be a matter of economics, a matter of responsibility, a cultural issue or a technology issue or a hundred other reasons. And this is not a new question. Every child, including me, has asked this question. It might not have been about cell phones, but it was the same question. For me, it was about a jack knife.

When I was about ten, I guess, I wanted a Barlow knife in the worst way. A Barlow knife is a type of pocket knife. It's a jack knife; it folds up when you're not using it. Anyway, it all my friends had pocket knives, but I couldn't have one. So I begged and pleaded, but my mother would not let me have a Barlow knife.

I can't remember the reason or reasons she gave me. They were all stupid reasons anyway, in my ten-year-old opinion. I mean what did my mother know about pocket knives and ten-year-old boys?

In time, probably when I was a teenager, I could walk in to a hardware store and buy a knife. But by then, I didn't want one anymore. So I never got a Barlow knife. I'm not saying that in five years you won't want a cell phone or that you'll never have one. You may have a cell phone someday, so don't despair over it.

Here's the answer: Parents do what they do because they believe they are doing the right thing for their families. Parents are not all alike, nor are children, so one child may be allowed to have something another child can not. Parents do what's right for their families, and what's right for one may not be right for another.

I am sorry you cannot have what you want, a cell phone. But I am not sorry you have parents who love you and are trying to do the best thing they can for you. You are lucky to have such parents. I know you may think differently about that.

Here's what you can do: Calmly ask you parents for their reasons. If it's a matter of age, there's nothing you can do about it; you'll just have to wait until you are older. If it's something else, ask what you can do to achieve the status they believe you need in order to have a cell phone. If there is absolutely no way on earth that you will have a cell phone while you are living in their home, I advise you to spend you energies pursuing something else.

The second question that someone put in the box is this:

**Why are we ignorant?** And who ever asked this question, printed it and wrote it in cursive, just to make sure I understood.

First, let's sort out the differences between ignorant, stupid, dumb and foolish.

A person who is ignorant could be unaccustomed to the culture. For instance, if I went on a tour of Bolivia, I would be ignorant of their customs and traditions. That's not a bad thing; it's just that I never had a chance to learn about Bolivia before I went there.

A person who is ignorant could be merely inexperienced. Suppose I had never seen a dog in my entire life. Not even a picture. And then you show me your dog. I wouldn't know how to pet the dog, how to speak to the dog, what dogs do, and what doo-doo dogs do.

I would be ignorant of dogs, because I had never experienced a dog before.

A person who is ignorant could be very young, like less than a year old. A year-old child is ignorant when compared to me or you or anyone who's been alive for awhile.

And a person who is ignorant could be unintelligent. Most of the people in this world are pretty much equal in intelligence. But there are some who are really sharp and some who are really dull. Sometimes the word ignorant is used to describe someone who's not very smart.

And then there's stupid, dumb and foolish. Stupid and dumb are a couple words that are used to mean many things, but mostly they mean not too smart. Foolish is a little different. It means lacking in good sense. Anyone can be foolish. Very smart people can be foolish.

I just wanted to get all that out there before I answer the question, "Why are we ignorant?" And I take the meaning of ignorant in this question to be lacking in knowledge, either through a lack of experience or a lack of research.

One of the things that happens to people as they live and grow is that they learn. They just can't help it. You mess around in the garden, like Nicole Barnhart did a few weeks ago, and you learn to look for, and identify poison ivy *before* the next time you mess around in your garden. You prepare dinner for your family, like I do, and you learn to cook green beans just enough to be tender, but not mushy. You hang around people who speak to you, like your parents, and you learn to speak to them. All that is learning by experience.

You study letters and you learn how they can be put together to make words. And words can be assembled to make sentences. And paragraphs. Pretty soon, you can read, and with a pen, you can write.

Then you can read a book and learn a recipe and make dinner. That's learning by research.

And until all that learning takes place, we are basically ignorant. Ignorant of poison ivy, ignorant of cooking, ignorant of anything until we learn about it.

But there is a problem with this word, "ignorant." The problem is that some people use it as a pejorative. A pejorative is a nasty label to slap on someone. Calling someone a jerk or an idiot or saying that someone is stupid is to use those three words as pejoratives. The word Unitarian was a pejorative until about 1825. People try to make the word liberal a pejorative. Ignorant really is not a pejorative, but it's spoken that way sometimes.

Ignorant merely means lacking in knowledge. It doesn't mean dumb or stupid. We are ignorant only because we haven't learned yet. And there is so much we can learn. Human beings know an awful lot about many things. But we know that we don't know it all. I believe we will never know everything about everything. The reason is that we can't help learning. Learning is fun for humans.

So we are basically ignorant of everything until we learn about it. We're ignorant because that is the way human beings are until they learn. Learning can be difficult. We sometimes make it harder to learn than it needs to be.

Someone asked me once what the purpose of life is. To grow, I replied. To grow spiritually, physically, emotionally and mentally. We can be ignorant in any of those areas. So learn all you can every day.

Thanks for asking questions; I hope you enjoyed the answers. And you can go to your classes now.

## OFFERTORY: Spirit Touch

A few months ago, Jiwan Giri was a guest speaker at the Forum. He is a friend of Hugh Everhart, who was instrumental in Jiwan's coming to the US to attend college. Jiwan went on to get a master's degree in public administration from George Washington University. He now works in the Clinical Research Monitoring Program in conjunction with the National Institutes for Health.

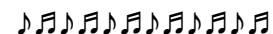
So why am I telling you this? Jiwan is also a board member of the Himanchal Education Foundation, which supports education and access to communications for the village of Nangi in Nepal. The Himanchal Education Foundation is a non-profit corporation based in the United States. The Himanchal High School is a prototype for community-based educational development in rural areas.

To give you an idea of how remote this village is, here is how to get to Nangi: It's about two or three days travel from Kathmandu. From Kathmandu, you take a seven hour bus ride to Pokhara, the second largest city in Nepal. From Pokhara, you travel by bus or taxi for 3 to 5 hours to reach Beni, the town nearest Nangi. Then you hike into Nangi, which usually takes six to nine hours, and includes an ascent through several mountain villages and forests. The elevation of Nangi is 7,345 feet. That's about a quarter of the way up Mount Everest.

With help from volunteers all across the world, today their school supports grades K through 12, including a computer lab with Internet connection. You can learn more by visiting their website at [www.himanchal.org](http://www.himanchal.org).

We'll collect the morning offering now for the support of Himanchal Education Foundation. this church, and we encourage your generosity when the plate comes your way. If you have a pledge payment, please mark it as such. As always, the Wood-Wilhoit Memorial Food Bank is happy to accept your donations of non-perishable food and household items for the Community

Kitchen. The collection basket for that is by the front door. If you wish to light a personal candle of joy or sorrow, you may step up here and Mary Hunter will assist you.



Eternal Spirit of life and love, we are profoundly thankful for the blessings we experience today. Would that we recognize our blessings every day and remember to be thankful for them.

Christina—and Jesse—please lead us in our Hymn of Thanksgiving.

## HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day,  
For all gathered here, and those far away,  
For this time we share, with love and care,  
Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day.

## ORISON

*Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.*

On Thursday, June 3, the American Family Association delivered 474,161 petition signatures to Home Depot chairman Frank Blake. AFA Vice-president Buddy Smith appealed to Chairman Blake to review Home Depot's extensive support for homosexual activism and direct the company toward neutrality in the culture war. Chairman Blake quickly discounted the petitions by reaffirming Home Depot's commitment to dedicating corporate resources to groups who advocate gay marriage and the advancement of homosexuality and transgenderism. In part, Chairman Blake said, "I hope all of our shareholders understand that we're a company that respects the diversity of our associates, our customers, and the communities where we do business."

AFA is promoting a boycott of Home Depot until it stops sponsoring homosexual pride events and commits to remain neutral in the culture war. I am promoting a counter-boycott. Like all big box stores, Home Depot isn't without its problems, but they've shown some real backbone. Next time I need a widget, I'll go there to buy it.

This is the prayer of the people, What we call the Orison. So in these next few moments, please speak the name of someone or something that needs our attention and prayers.

Thou, which are everywhere,  
Many are your names.  
May we always feel your presence,  
May your wisdom guide us,  
In our deeds as well as in our dreams.  
May we have what sustains our body and soul;  
Lead us first to forgive the mistakes of others  
Even as we hope our own mistakes will soon be forgiven.  
May we resist the temptation of the quick and easy,  
And be delivered from that which demeans and destroys life.  
May we live purposefully and joyfully  
in every moment, in every encounter,  
now, and in the time to come.

During this time of silence let us hold close to our hearts those who strive everyday to make the world a better place, but let us never forget those who suffer the fallout of war.

*Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.*

#### RESPONSE

When our heart is in a holy place  
When our heart is in a holy place  
We are blessed with love and amazing grace  
When our heart is in a holy place

#### HERE

Here may no one be altogether a stranger,  
no honesty of thought ignored,  
no depth of feeling dismissed,  
no life belittled, and no life shut out.

Here may clarity of mind and heart  
be humbly treasured,  
brought to bear toward word and person.

Here may fellowship be treasured most of all  
and paths to sustain and renew it  
be sought and found.

Here may growth of spirit be our purpose;  
such understanding as shall lead us  
to make the world a better place.

#### SERMON: The Question Box

Each year, on the Sunday before I begin vacation, I produce this service, which I call The Question Box. This is the Question Box. This beee-yoo-tee-full box has been sitting in the fellowship area for a month or thereabouts. Several people whose inquiring minds want to know something have placed questions in the box, and this morning, I will do my best to give a decent answer to all.

And the first question is, **“What is liberal religion? How is it different from Christian liberal religion?”**

In essence “liberal” means “open minded, generous-spirited, kindhearted, and open handed.” Now if we combine this with the meaning of religion which is what reconnects us to that which is ultimately important, then liberal religion is a path and institutions which help us to reconnect or be aware of that of ultimate

importance, the Holy, through methods and principles which are “open minded, generous-spirited, kindhearted, and open handed,” and ultimately optimistic.

Here are two answers from liberal theologians.

In his book, *The Challenge of a Liberal Faith*, George Marshall writes, “Liberal religion does not settle down into being a static faith, a building-block philosophy. Instead, liberal religion is a quest for values which each person develops individually. A liberal religious church is a church of people who develop a faith of their own.”

However, the one I like best, the one that is closest to my ideas comes from the Rev. William Sloan Coffin. He writes that,

*On the religious side, liberals believe that the integrity of love is more important than the purity of dogma. Dogma is a sign post, love is a hitching post. Liberals contend that we should sharpen our minds, not narrow them. We understand that faith, far from clearing up uncertainty, makes it possible to live with uncertainty. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, cannot bear uncertainty. They indulge in what psychiatrists call “premature closure,” the tendency to stop considering other possibilities. Liberals contend that one of the most wonderful things about life is to act wholeheartedly without absolute certainty.*

Now as to how liberal religion is different from liberal Christian religion, only one thing. Liberal Christians, like the United Church of Christ, usually accept the whole heaven, hell and salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus thing. Or they perhaps accept some of it and reject the rest. Liberal Christians are those members of Christian churches whose rational nature and experience of modern life tells them that some aspects of traditional dogma and doctrine are not to be swallowed whole.

Liberal Christians probably accept the ordination of women. They

probably accept gay men and women as ministers or church members. If you follow the news of the Episcopal Church, you will learn that some members have problems with ordaining women and with homosexuals, either in the pulpit or the pew. It all comes down to this: The modern understanding and experience of humanity does not square with the traditional interpretation of the Bible. Liberal Christians are doing their best to remain in their churches and reform their theologies and practices.

### **Why are ministers the only professionals who get a paid sabbatical? Don't we all need this?**

Well, ministers are not the only professionals who might take a sabbatical. It's quite common in academia. As a matter of fact, George Helton recently returned from a sabbatical. It's not unheard of in business or industry, either, although probably only at the higher echelons of management.

The reason for a sabbatical for academics or ministers is that they can get stale or burn out.

Stale. Can you imagine a professor who teaches, oh, I don't know, basic psychology, for instance? The principles of basic psychology change very little, I suppose, from one year to the next. There is perhaps a lot of change at the margins, where specialities are taught. But at the center, where the basics are taught, psychology probably doesn't change all that much. It would be easy for a professor to get so proficient at teaching basic psychology that she could almost stay at home and fax it in.

You see what I mean. Easy to get stale. A sabbatical provides the professor with new challenges, shakes up the old brain cells and perhaps, improves technique for the next semester. The professor might also indulge in research, write a book, take a class or otherwise increase the knowledge in the psychological field, which could not be done during the academic year. And ultimately, the student

benefits.

And all that could be said about ministers as well. Preaching could become robotic and uninspired, a minister might not see pastoral or administrative issues, or may feel unchallenged. A sabbatical revives the minister and ultimately, the congregation is the real beneficiary.

Burn out. It's well-known that teachers, physicians, social workers, ministers, firefighters, police and others in high-stress human service occupations suffer disproportionately from burn-out. Taking a sabbatical allows them to recharge for another round.

Should everyone have a sabbatical? Yes, I believe that's a good idea, for it's not only ministers who get stale and not only ministers who burn out. Parents might need a sabbatical. Anyone who brings his job home might need a sabbatical.

I regret that I do not know, especially in this rapacious economy, how to make that happen. The best I can suggest is to ask for an unpaid leave and hope that your job is there when you return.

### **What books have had the most influence over your life?**

Gotta say, right off the bat, that I am not a bookworm. Which makes me the odd minister out among Unitarian Universalists. UU ministers are a bookish lot. Not that I haven't read some books. That's all I did in seminary.

Taking a quick look around my office, I see the books I use the most are reference books to assist me in producing worship services. There are also a bunch of books about ministry and Unitarian Universalism, some children's books and several concerning spiritual subjects. None are in the category of "the most influence over my life."

The "books" that have had the most influence over my life are not

books. What exerts influence in my life is newspapers, magazines, plays, movies, TV and music. So answering the question from that perspective, the musical theatre has formed a large part of me. *Oklahoma, Carnival, West Side Story, A Little Night Music, Guys and Dolls, Cats, Phantom of the Opera, Miss Saigon, The Sound of Music*, you know, all the blockbusters. Especially *Camelot*, which I so loved—and still do—that it prompted me to find the book from which it was adapted and read it. So if there must be a book that influences me, it is *The Once and Future King*, by T. H. White.

For legitimate theatre, what influences me is mostly what I have done, except that Shakespeare is inspiring, whether I've done it or not. I have always read the daily paper of the city in which I lived. At present, I am not entirely satisfied with what is delivered to my door. I skim the New York Times online and read articles which interest me. I subscribe to *Harper's, The Atlantic, The New Yorker* and *The Week*.

Movies, oh, there are too many. I remember being mesmerized by *Blow-Up, Funny Girl* and *Camelot*. Musical theater again, only on film. I studied film as an undergrad and now I think I am spoiled for movies. It's impossible for me to watch a movie without a critical eye. And TV has influenced my life. I probably saw every episode of *The Lone Ranger* and *The Rifleman* and I know I absorbed the moral code embedded in those shows. I recall watching *Roots* and being blown away.

There is one book that I read in seminary that continues to haunt me. *The Heart of Understanding*, by Thich Nhat Hanh. It's his commentary on the Heart Sutra, the essence of Buddhist teaching.

### **How do you view other people? As in, how do you feel others impact your life (mood, influence, and so forth).**

Oh, yikes. You should know that I am not comfortable in groups where I do not know anyone or only a few. I don't have finely tuned

social skills. I'm not a gadabout. As a result, I tend to put my back to the wall and watch everyone else. Being present to the congregation on Sunday mornings is probably the hardest thing I do all week. So I don't seek people out, unless I have a real good reason. And yet, I take something from anyone who comes to me.

You have probably heard, "You are what you eat." It means that what you eat influences your health and your appearance. I often say, "You are who you meet." I mean all the people you meet and all your experiences are part of what makes you the individual you are.

So everyone I meet is right here, and exerting some influence.

I have often thought that people scare me. I think that comes from my childhood experience of being bullied. So sometimes, I close myself to others as a defense. I work on that every day, but what you learn as a child stays with you, so it's hard.

For many years, I worked with things, not people. And you might say, "Wow, Jeff, you are sure in a people-oriented occupation now." Yeah, and I recognize the irony in that. But I think that if something scares me I ought to run toward it, not away from it. So here I am, not comfortable with a large group of people and I throw myself into it each Sunday and, in other ways, every day.

**The universe is apparently 15 billion light years in diameter, but then there's nothing after that. What does that mean? If I were traveling in a space ship at the edge of the universe, and I came upon nothing, what would I see? What would I feel? What are the implications?**

Well, one implication is that the person who asked these questions has too much time on his hands. Actually, he under-states the size of the universe. According to what I read, the observable universe, that part we can see from earth, is a sphere with a diameter of 92 billion

light years. And that's just the part we can see. I suppose that we see a very small part, so the universe itself is waaaay larger, and possibly infinite.

As a matter of fact, if its name is *universe*, then it *is* infinite. Universe means everything. Ev-ree-thing. So, I'd have to say that there is no edge to the universe, and if you travel in a spaceship far enough, you'll just come back to where you began.

And you cannot experience, in any of your senses, nothing. By definition, nothing cannot be observed. Because there is no thing there to be observed. So even if the universe were finite, and you came to the edge of it, if there is nothing out there, then there is no thing. And that has never happened, out there or here on earth and so no one has ever reported what he saw.

**Seems like we shoot ourselves in the foot. With such a diversity of opinion, how can we accomplish anything of lasting effect in such matters as social justice?**

In other words, what's it gonna take? It's gonna take someone who wants to lead the effort. Organization and leadership. That's the most important thing.

It's gonna take a big issue that is personal for many people. Like desegregation and civil rights. It's gonna take something different than marches, demonstrations, letters to the editor and charity walk-a-thons. It's gonna take work. It's gonna take commitment.

If this were St. John's Church and if I were the parish priest, I could just say we're gonna have a soup kitchen or a clothing store or whatever. And we'd raise the money, build the thing and we'd just do it. Because Father Jeff said so.

But we can't do that. And that's a big drawback to congregational polity, our governance system. Everybody's gotta be on board before

we move. But when we move, we're united.

**Is it pompous to insist that you can be a good person without a god telling you that you should be?**

No, it's not pompous. In my opinion, you can learn to be good from a variety of sources. I think morality can be taught or caught. The issue that's driving this question is whether moral behavior is learned or innate.

There are many people who believe God is the origin of morals and the way we learn to be good is through religious teachings. There is no evidence of these opinions, only arguments.

There are many people who believe that morality is an aspect of human beings and that we learn to be good from our parents and our environment. There is some evidence, although it's not conclusive, that early in their history, human beings learned to cooperate because they saw the advantages to being good guys. So I think it's likely that some rudimentary moral code is within us from the day we're born. It can be strengthened and amplified by religious teachings or by one's parents and experiences. Or both. It's not an "either-or" proposition.

**Jeff, you've said that your conception of God is what happens when two people get together and communicate. Could you expand on that? What happens when three people get together? It seems like a rather restrictive definition of God. Please explain.**

Actually, what I have said is that I believe God lives in the little tiny space between people in a relationship. The number of people is not important. I arrived at this concept of God after thinking about something I heard in seminary. It was in the summer, and I was in the midst of clinical pastoral education, a three-month stint as chaplain in a hospital. I had just finished a verbatim with my group

when a member of the group said, "I believe God brings people together to create something."

It struck me that the statement described what God does, not what God is. And yet, knowing what God does, I got an idea of what God is. It also occurred to me that God did not have to have a personality, that God could be a force, like cosmic magnetism, drawing people together.

You ever try to put two magnets together on the wrong poles? They are forced apart. You can feel the force. You can also feel the strength drawing them together. But you can't hear it or touch it or smell it or taste it or see it. Well, maybe you could see it with an electron microscope. And I thought maybe God is like that. Something intangible between people holding them together.

And the more I thought about it, the more that concept of God was comfortable in my mind. Cosmic glue, cosmic magnetism. Then I thought that if God drew people together or held them together, then God must exist between people. And so I say, God lives in the little tiny space between people in a relationship. Even in a bad relationship, God is there. Notice that my statement doesn't define God, it merely indicates where to find him. Or her.

And this leads me to say something else: I don't pray *to* God; I pray *for* God. After much more thought about this, I have also concluded that God has no agency; he can't wave his finger and make my goldfish swim backwards; she can't make me levitate and he can't make my car get 90 miles to the gallon. She doesn't interfere in human affairs.

So my God is a relational god, and is contained in the essence of human relationships.

**Do UU ministers go to seminary by choice or do they have that same "supernatural" calling that the Christians and Catholics**

## **receive when they're in the shower?**

I was tempted to answer this question by describing my own shower experience, but Kate called me off.

Going to seminary is entirely voluntary. Most of my colleagues speak of a calling. But they don't speak in a whisper or shiver when they recount their tales; they don't gaze heavenward or cross themselves. For me, the guy who speaks in images, I always said that I felt nudged toward the ministry. You can resist nudging only so long.

I think my mother's influence is responsible for my ethic of service, which is critical to the ministry. But I first felt nudged when I realized that I could preach better than some ministers I had heard. Just as any other profession, ministry harbors some people that should have done something else. Some ministers are abysmal, and I guess I met some in those days, and I thought that I could do this, and I wanted to serve. And when I asked ministers about preparing for the ministry, the response I got was, "Only do it if you must. Only do it if you can't or won't do anything else."

Well, I couldn't do anything else, so here I am.

I suspect that for every minister, Christian or not, there was a moment when the thought occurred to them that they might go into the ministry. It's not a decision to be made lightly, as you spend a lot of time and money preparing for it. And even after you've finished your studies, you are examined by a panel of people to determine if you are ready to serve the people in a parish. And that's a scary thing.

Speaking for Unitarian Universalists, used to be, you were sponsored through seminary, but not any more. Now, you have to pay your own way, and it's not cheap. There are many gates and hurdles along the way. A graduate degree in theology or divinity is needed, a seminar

to determine your psychological makeup and aptitude for ministry, a three-month stint as a chaplain in a hospital, a year-long internship, a reading list a mile long, appearances before panels, and other requirements. It's not a journey for the faint of heart, I can assure you. But there is tremendous support among your colleagues.

It took me five years. I had to wait a year after my first appearance before the examining committee because they thought I was not ready. I wasn't. The year was good.

## **I would like to know what this emblem represents for the people of this church.**

This is the emblem. Inga Johannesen created this for us. Inga, please stand up so that I can thank you publicly for this.

It's a chalice. With a flame. A stylized representation of the one we light each Sunday. In its original version, it's rainbow-colored, a reference to the fact that we are a Welcoming Congregation and that means welcoming to all, especially gay and lesbian people. We also hang a rainbow flag right over there and there is a rainbow flag on the front door along with a poster announcing this fact.

Lighting the chalice has as many meanings as people in the room. People speak about the light of truth, a beacon in the dark, warmth dispelling fear, the guiding light—no, not the soap opera—a signal and many other impressions.

As to the chalice, the short version of the story is that it was first used by the Unitarian Service Committee as an official-looking emblem on the identity cards and papers they created during World War II. They were trying to get Jews and others targeted by the Nazis out of Europe, and they thought a flaming chalice might look impressive to border guards. It worked. They got a lot of people out.

You can find another chalice on the bell tower. Here's another

chalice. This one was created by Kay Spehar when these drapes were installed.

Last question. **I can't think of any questions! Will I be kicked out of the congregation?**

No, you won't. You have a whole year to think of something for the next question box service.

In a couple days, Kate and I will leave for a baby shower for my eldest daughter. Then we'll return to Chattanooga and wait until she calls and says the baby is on its way. I expect I'll be back in town to stay around mid-July. If the baby cooperates and arrives on time.

Stay safe, and if you need to reach me in an emergency, Chris will know how to contact me. And I hope to see you right back here in a few minutes when we will have an open mike session on the church and church life and governance.

Let's finish this sermon with questioning hymn. Join me please in singing Hymn 112, "Do You Hear?"

### **Hymn 112, Do You Hear?**

#### **EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE**

We extinguish this flame,  
but not the light of its truth,  
the warmth of this community,  
nor the fire of our commitment.

These we carry in our hearts  
and share with all the world.

#### **BENEDICTION**

For a benediction, I want you to stop. Just stop.

I have a slow toaster. It seems to take forever to toast a slice of bread. The other morning, I caught myself rushing the toaster. I peered into it and wondered how I could force my toast to cook faster. Then I laughed at myself, and settled into the present moment. Left alone to work its magic, the toaster did its job and produced nice toast in about eight minutes.

I thought to create a stop sign practice out of the experience of toasting bread. The practice is simple. Putting bread into the toaster is my reminder to let go; a visual and kinesthetic stop sign. During the eight minutes that the bread is browning, I breathe, and calm my mental and physical activity. Waiting for toast is an opportunity for me to experience a little peace.

Streets and highways in the United States have a symbol for stopping: a red, octagonal sign with white letters that reads **STOP**. In driver's education, we learn that when we see such a sign, we are to make a complete stop. We are to be in full awareness, looking right, looking left, and checking the pedestrian crosswalk before proceeding.

This is a practice of mindfulness, a practice of stopping. So stop. Just stop.

#### **POSTLUDE: Dance of My Ancestors**

Thank you very much for your participation in our service this morning. Parents, please rejoin your children now and we'll enjoy a time of fellowship with the best fair-trade coffee in southeastern Tennessee. And rejoin us right here in about ten minutes for a congregational conversation and open mike session.