

*With a Sense of Loss, a Sense of Passage*  
**Reverend Kent Hemmen Saleska**  
**UU Church of Minnetonka**  
**January 3, 2010**

**READINGS – Four Obituaries: three UU ministers and one minister’s wife**

**JAMES MADISON BARR III (1919 - 2009)**

It is with a sense of loss that the Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group informs you of the death of the Reverend Dr. James Madison Barr. He died on June 10, 2009 at his home in Hot Springs, Arkansas. He was 90. Rev. Barr is survived by three daughters, five grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Rev. Barr was born on March 17, 1919 in Belhaven, North Carolina to James Madison Barr, Jr., and Alice Way Barr. His family relocated to Virginia, where he attended Fork Union Military Academy, graduating in 1935. He continued his education at the University of Virginia, studying accounting and business before graduating with a law degree in 1947.

Following graduation, Rev. Barr taught at the School of Economics and Commerce at the University of Virginia... While in Charlottesville, Rev. Barr became an active member of the Thomas Jefferson Unitarian Universalist Church and in 1952 he entered Starr King School for the Ministry. In 1954, Rev. Barr was ordained and installed at the Church of the Unity in Winchendon, Massachusetts...

In 1962, he returned to the South of his childhood, serving the First Unitarian Church of Memphis from 1962 to 1982. Under his leadership, the congregation built an award-winning church designed by church member, Roy Harrover. Located on the banks of the Mississippi River, its wall of windows allows full view of the Mississippi. Upon his retirement from the Memphis “Church of the River,” Rev. Barr was named minister emeritus by his congregants.

His friend and colleague, Rev. Burton Carley, current minister in Memphis, said, “any minister stands on the shoulders of the minister who precedes him. Jim’s shoulders were very broad. He had a deep mind and wonderful spirit. It was a privilege to succeed him.”

**BARBARA E. HOLLERORTH (1926 – 2009)**

It is with a sense of loss that the Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group informs you of the death of the Reverend Barbara E. Hollerorth. She died at the home of her daughter, Rachel Buerlen, in Rutland, Massachusetts on April 14, 2009. She was 82.

Rev. Hollerorth was born on September 21, 1926, in Waterloo, Iowa, to Winfield Scott and Elizabeth Moulton. She attended the Universities of Iowa and Chicago where she studied social sciences. She graduated from The Chicago Theological Seminary with a Bachelor of Divinity in 1952.

After her 1952 ordination at the Plymouth Congregational Church in Maywood, Illinois, Rev. Hollerorth directed an experimental nursery school program there. After years spent raising her children, Rev. Hollerorth was called to serve as Associate Minister of the First Parish Church, Unitarian Universalist, in Lexington, Massachusetts. It was while serving in Lexington that she created *The Haunting House*, a widely acclaimed early childhood curriculum which

helped young children discover the importance of houses in people's lives. The curriculum was published by the Unitarian Universalist Association and used throughout the denomination as well as in secular settings.

While serving First Parish in Lexington, Rev. Hollerorth became aware of the need for pastoral counseling services and felt called to provide them. She enrolled in Andover Newton Theological School, receiving her Doctor of Ministry with a pastoral counseling specialty in 1974. In 1975, Rev. Hollerorth began directing the newly-formed Unitarian Universalist Pastoral Counseling Service of Greater Boston, a position she held for many years. Rev. Barbara Hollerorth is survived by her husband, two daughters, and three grandchildren.

### **DRUSILLA "DRU" CUMMINS (1925 - 2009)**

Born in 1925 as a third generation Universalist, Drusilla "Dru" Congdon was raised under the influence of a strong family and of the First Universalist Church of Brunswick, Maine. After graduating from Mount Holyoke College, she taught English and drama at her local high school. She met the Rev. John Cummins (now Minister Emeritus of First Universalist Church of Minneapolis) in 1950 when he was became the new minister of the Congdon's small church as a fresh graduate of the Harvard School of Divinity.

John and Dru married in 1951, and Dru gave up her teaching career to be John's helpmate and raise the couple's children. The family moved to Minneapolis in 1963 when John was called to serve the First Universalist Church of Minneapolis. Dru was a loving mother to three children: Chris, Carol, and Clyde. She was preceded in death by Chris when he committed suicide in his twenties.

Dru's mother's exhortation to use her education haunted her until she was elected to the board of the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation (UUWF), a feminist organization that promotes equal representation of women throughout the denomination, full support for women ministers, gender-neutral language, and a continental program of leadership development. Elected President of the group in 1973, Dru Cummins and others went to the Unitarian Universalist (UUA) General Assembly in Philadelphia in 1974 to ask for space for the UU Women's Federation to present the first Ministry to Women Award, but they were refused because they were an auxiliary organization. Undeterred, Dru and others called a press conference, rented a suburban UU church, and 55 buses to take the women there, so that they could present the First Ministry to Women Award to Ms. Magazine editors Gloria Steinem and Pat Carbine. The award came full circle when Dru received it in 2000.

Dru's efforts for women's rights in the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) eventually led to the elimination of sexist language in the UUA hymnal and other worship materials, revision of the UUA Principles and Purposes, and a surge of women into ministry in the denomination.

Having cracked the glass ceiling, in rapid succession Dru was elected trustee of the Unitarian Universalist Association, second vice moderator, first vice moderator, and chair of several committees. These positions gave her opportunities to empower other women. She later served as the first female chair of the board of Meadville Lombard Theological School at the University of Chicago. In 1991 she accepted the UUA's Distinguished Service Award with her husband, the Rev. John Cummins. In 1992, Dru wrote, "I had been empowered by our liberating faith, and by women and men who share that faith."

After suffering the effects of Alzheimer's disease, Dru died at the Hennepin County Medical Center on November 29 at the age of 84.

### FORREST CHURCH (1949 - 2009)

It is with a sense of loss that the Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group informs you of the death of the Reverend Dr. Forrest Church. Rev. Church died on September 24, 2009, following a three-year battle with esophageal cancer. He was sixty-one years old. He is survived by his children, Frank, Nina, Jacob and Nathan, and by his wife, Carolyn Buck Luce.

The son of former U.S. Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho) and grandson of former Idaho Governor Chase A. Clark, Forrest Church earned his Ph.D. in early church history from Harvard University in 1978, and began his career at All Souls that same year at the age of 29. He served All Souls from then until his death.

During Church's tenure at the congregation, All Souls flourished, more than tripling its membership in the past three decades. With over 1,400 members, All Souls is one of the largest congregations in the UU Association today.

As All Souls grew, so too did Church's prominence as a public voice for Unitarian Universalism and for social justice. He was a strong proponent of both religious and political liberalism. In 1985, he led All Souls Church in learning about AIDS and providing direct services to AIDS sufferers. *New York* reporter Bernice Kanner wrote that year, "The mobilization of All Souls was among the first religious responses to the disease."

In 1986, Church told the *Boston Globe*, "...generally, politicians try to change society for the betterment of the individual. I like to change the individual for the betterment of society."

Church reached a wide audience through the approximately two dozen books that he authored or edited in the course of his career. He published his first book, *Father and Son: A Personal Biography of Senator Frank Church of Idaho*, in 1985. Church's final book, *The Cathedral of the World: A Universalist Theology*, was published by Beacon Press in November.

At the UUA's 2008 General Assembly, Church received the Award for Distinguished Service to the Cause of Unitarian Universalism, the most prestigious award given by the UUA. Upon receiving the reward, Church remarked, "Let us never forget what a privilege it is to be part of this great movement and to pronounce its saving faith: one Light (Unitarianism) shining through many windows (Universalism). Let us continue our quest together, with awe and humility, with saving openness and saving doubt, never forgetting to honor those who charted our way."

Church spent his final years reflecting on the importance of living each day with love and gratitude. He writes in his book, *Love and Death*, "The goal is to live in such a way that our lives will prove worth dying for...The one thing that can't be taken from us, even by death, is the love we give away before we go."

[End of readings – Sermon begins on next page]

## SERMON

### *With a Sense of Loss, a Sense of Passage* Reverend Kent Hemmen Saleska

The Roman god Janus is a two-faced god, with one face looking forward and one face looking backward. It is from this god that we get the name of this month, “January,” a month that takes place on the cusp of a new year, a time to take to recall the events of the previous year, even as we look forward to the future. In honor of this Roman god and this mid-winter month, today we take some time to look back on the year that has passed, and next Sunday, in a sort of a two-part service, we will look ahead to the future.

We have endured and engaged many changes this past year. A year ago, this congregation was fresh off a December denial from the Wayzata City Council to rezone residential property to institutional for us to construct a new church building. On the surface, it may seem as though we have not gotten very far, but our Board and our Relocation Task Force have been hard at work for months, engaging in deep, thoughtful, and intentional conversations and decision-making.

Also at this point a year ago, we in this nation were preparing to inaugurate our first black president. A year later, I’m sure we have various perspectives and opinions on President Barack Obama’s work, but even so, we as a nation were transformed by his vision, and by our participation in the Democratic process.

We had our first ever leadership development workshop – including some first-time communication and clarification between groups – in late January with our three primary leadership bodies, the Board, the Church Council, and the Committee on Ministry. Here in our congregation, we participated in our own Democratic process, electing a new Board of Trustees in May. We also had significant transition in the facilitators of our eight ministries, including the ministries of Communications, Community, Membership, Finance, and Worship Arts, leaving only our Facilities Ministry and Social Justice Ministry unaffected.

Many of our members experienced personal change or grief with the loss of jobs or the ending of relationships, and the deaths of a brother, a sister, a mother, a father, or a child. And the other things occurred as well. I officiated at three weddings last year, and at least three babies were born, among them my own daughter, born last March (she has brought the biggest change to our lives this past year!). We also held our first-ever Social Justice Empowerment weekend at the end of September, during which we narrowed down and created our three social justice priorities this year: the environment, health care, and issues regarding people who are Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgender.

Also for the first time, members of this congregation engaged in the generosity challenge that was offered in February. Seven individuals or families completed the challenge to accept \$20 and grow that money and bring back the profits, plus the original \$20, for our congregational and social justice work. In all, those seven individuals and families – in addition to other families who did not complete the challenge but donated personal money – took the total of \$300 that was given away in February, and returned a total of more than \$2,500! That is at least an 800% return on our investment! This is proof not just of generosity, but of our creativity and

capacity to think beyond traditional boundaries. This bodes well as we look forward with the forward-looking face of Janus, as we contemplate our future and our vision, and how we plan to make it happen.

Last year we also began building a deeper foundation for our institution, for our faith, and for our action. Several of our members attended our annual district conference for the first time, saw a different Unitarian Universalist Church, talked with UUs from seven different states, and were inspired to bring back new ideas here. To understand a deeper theory behind our action, the Social Justice Ministry read the book, *The Prophetic Imperative*, chapter-by-chapter last year. And this year, copying that success in an ongoing leadership development effort, our three primary leadership groups, the Board, the Church Council, and Committee on Ministry – 23 people in all – are reading a book called, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, subtitled, *Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*.

In this time of great anxiety in our congregation over our relocation efforts, as well as during the instability created by these unstable economic times, all 23 of our congregational leaders are reading this *Congregational Leadership* book chapter-by-chapter as well, one chapter each month, in order to remain as focused, thoughtful, proactive, and intentional as possible. Our leadership – one-eighth of our entire church membership – are all learning from the same material so we can engage each other in the same conversation in order to guide us with a unified sense of calm and courage.

We did a lot last year. And we continue to do a lot. And we continue to change as the world continues to change. As the saying goes, the only thing we can be sure of is change. Last week I saw on a church sign board the saying, “Change is Inevitable, Growth is Optional.” Change will come to us, no matter what. Our only choice in the matter is what we will do and how we will learn from that transformation. I will explore this in more depth next Sunday – but for now, I just want us to be reminded of how much we have done, where we’ve come from and what we’ve gone through. It helps to know where we’ve been before we can figure out where we want to go.

Typically, we in Western culture tend to look at change as a good thing. Advertisement companies attempt to convince us that when something is “New!” it also “Improved!” Doctors research diseases to find new cures, scientists discover new elements and stars, and sometimes even develop household items to make our lives more comfortable. But with all this, change isn’t always better. And even if change is a good thing, that doesn’t necessarily make it easy. Change can cause anxiety, and it can be scary, and it can make us feel sad because we remember how things used to be and we yearn for those good things.

As we consider the face of Janus that looks backward, it is important to honor this sadness as well. It can be the simple sadness of time and events gone by, or a deeper sadness of things lost, of relationships that ended, and of people who have died.

I am on a few different minister email lists, and every few weeks I get an email from our district offices or from the Unitarian Universalist Association about the death of one of my ministerial colleagues. Sometimes I know the people, but I am still young enough and new enough in this profession that I do not know most of the ministers whose profiles and obituaries get sent to me. And yet, even though I don’t know them, I make it a point to read about those lives – the ministers whose deeds, great and small, changed the course of our Unitarian Universalist movement, or simply challenged and nourished the lives of the people they served over the course of a 30 or 40 or 50 year life of ministry.

Each time one of those emails comes to me, it always begins with these words: “It is with a sense of loss that the Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group informs you of the death of the Reverend...” Each time I read the stories of each minister’s life, a whole bunch of thoughts go through my head. For some of the older ones, those who served in the 1950s and 60s and 70s, I wonder what justice work they did, and I wonder about the changes they must have seen as our faith tradition transformed from two separate denominations – the Unitarians and the Universalists – into one Unitarian Universalist Association during the merger in 1961.

As I work with you and walk with you through our own relocation efforts, I wonder which of the ministers I read about went through a church building or relocation effort, and what issue they had to address as they did.

I also wonder how many people and how many lives each minister touched during his or her ministry. Behind the short obituary and life story, I wonder what struggles and successes they had: how they found balance in their lives between their call to ministry and their desire to raise children; how they articulated their vision to their congregations; how in their over-full lives they expressed love to their families; how and when and why they inspired and succeeded, and how and when and why they argued and failed.

And so it is that with this sense of loss I feel after reading these emails about the deaths of these luminaries within our liberal religious tradition, I also feel a sense of passage. Just as the life and the work of 2009 passes on to the life and the work of 2010, so it is that the work of these former ministers has passed on to my colleagues and me. Just as the life and the work of previous members and Boards and ministers of this congregation pass on to the members and Boards and minister of this congregation today.

Reading about these lives that have gone before – standing on the shoulders of those who precede us – fills me with a sense of honor and privilege. Each time we try something new we do not start over at the beginning. We are building on the work and vision and dedication and inspiration of those who came earlier. Everyone has their failings, but as we move from the past into the future, we look to the best in our mentors, to the greatest career and life lessons we remember from what they taught and how they lived.

I think of the care and welcome Reverend Barbara Hollerorth provided for our children in the lifetime of religious education curriculum she created; I think of the award-winning new church building constructed during the leadership of Reverend James Madison Barr III; I think of the sexist glass ceiling within our own Unitarian Universalism shattered by Dru Cummins in the 1970s; and I think of the voice of liberal religion preached far and wide through sermons and books in the compassionate voice for the suffering in the presence of the beloved Reverend Forrest Church, even as he suffered through the last years of his illness.

And so I wonder about those mentors and teachers in your lives who are now gone: college professors; supervisors; friends. But I also think of those in our lives we have known more intimately and from whom we have learned more permanently: the joy and love of life emanating from a small boy dying of cancer; an estranged brother struggling to make amends who died in a car accident; a difficult but loving mother succumbing to the ravages of a disease; a longtime witty companion dying of old age.

Let us make a few moments of silence to remember these people, and so many more from each one of our lives, as we ponder the best things from the past that are still meaningful to us – the things we still want to take with us and hope to carry on into the future.

*[A Few Moments of Silence]*

From our opening responsive reading, Thandeka writes: “Be still my inner self...let me reach down into your pain and soothe you. I turn to you to renew my life...This common world I love anew, as the lifeblood of generations who refused to surrender their humanity in an inhumane world, courses through my veins. From within this world my despair is transformed to hope, and I begin anew the legacy of caring” (*Singing the Living Tradition*; reading #666).

We do not arise anew by praying for rescue from beyond this world, but by moving through and learning “from *within* this world.” It is through the common world, through our turning again and again toward our pain rather than running away from it, through our decision over and over to love, that vision is transformed into reality, and our despair is transformed into hope.