LEADERSHIP NOTES: CO-PRESIDENT

Dear Alliance Siblings,

Last January I closed my Fellowship letter as secretary to the Alliance with this prayer:
May we transition into co-creating the Beloved Community through our connections with ministry, religious programming, social justice, and the larger community of which we are a part. The overall theme for this church year is Beloved Community and for the month of September, Hospitality. Both themes are reflected in the mission and work of our Alliance membership.

Beloved community, a phrase Martin Luther King, Jr. used, connotes the openness and inclusion many of us work to create in our various communities. The generous and friendly welcoming of strangers and guests more specifically describes hospitality. In some religious circles the phrase “radical hospitality” emphasizes the proactive nature of welcoming the stranger. What does this mean for Alliance members? How do we show our welcome to guests? To whom do we reach out to invite into our wonderful Alliance circle? Could we do better?

During these very challenging times of family separation, racial attacks, border walls, and hate speech, let us each reflect on these themes and consider adding “radical hospitality” to our daily spiritual practice. This is the beginning of our church year. Together we have the opportunity to change hate into caring relationships. This year we have a program filled with potential for learning and inspiration as well as many opportunities to practice hospitality. Let’s work together to make Beloved Community a reality.

Yours in companionship on this journey,
Lena Lee

MEMBER IN PROFILE: Harriet Denison

Portland is native territory to Harriet Denison, her home base and respite between world explorations. Her hillside garden – a backyard habitat behind her longtime home – leads to Forest Park paths. The view north to Mount St. Helens passes over drifts of orange Peruvian lily and velvety milkweed. Birds frequent her feeders and fill the air with song.

After graduation from Lincoln High School and then Pomona College with a chemistry degree, Harriet departed to Tanzania in ’64 to teach biology with the Peace Corps. She married afterward, and the two embarked on life under sail from San Diego to Mazatlán aboard their 65’ sailboat. Once independent, Harriet anchored on land awhile in Port Townsend; she cycled, climbed mountains, and explored marine life via scuba before she returned to Portland.

Though she has a master’s degree in Organizational Development and has served on numerous boards — currently including First Church’s Foundation — Harriet’s passion remains with “intense experience with the natural world.” In 2001 she took the first of 16 serious international birding trips, including Antarctica, Madagascar, and Bhutan. Traipsing rugged terrain,
Harriet Denison, continued

searched bird skyways “noting behaviors” and taking extensive notes in journals. (See below.) Tuned to listening, not to field guides, she “loves to connect each bird to its sound.”

Singing and listening enrich her life each day. Once a member of our Chalice Choir, her current “first priority” is the Threshold Choir, a volunteer group committed to singing for hospice patients. Threshold is just one of many on her “list of communities” that includes a senior Dragon Boat team, hiking, and our church community – to which she was introduced by her grandmother in the 1950’s. While Harriet admits frankly her resistance to “the rigidity of other churches,” she joined First UU Church in 1988 and the Alliance this year.

Admittedly an introvert, Harriet’s quiet demeanor belies boundless curiosity and scholarship about the natural world.

MEMBER IN PROFILE: Rev. Katherine Jesch

Thank you, Katherine Jesch! Katherine is the new editor of our Fellowship, as well as an ordained UU minister. Her ministry, devoted primarily to environmental and social justice, affirms a commitment to caring for Earth which she demonstrated early in her Girl Scout years; she chose troops that offered sailing and navigation as well as hiking and backpacking.

Born in Oakland, one of nine siblings, Katherine attended Catholic schools and lived briefly in a convent. Married at 20, she gave birth to her son the next year. When her marriage ended, she took a first job alluringly titled, ‘oceanographic technician.’

Mixing work and schooling, Katherine focused on oceanography to earn an AA degree, followed by a BS in Urban Planning. For her initial job, she drafted a plan for coastal restoration of a lagoon in Del Mar, California. She achieved her master’s degree in Environmental Management at USC.

Katherine’s reflection on “what’s next?” led to work with the US Forest Service in land use planning, first in California, then in the Pacific Northwest. Her dream job was as the planning director when the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area was established in 1986.

Around this time, her new husband introduced her to Unitarian Universalism at his church in Spokane. After moving to Washington D.C. in 1990, they attended the UU church in Arlington, VA. It was a sermon on “shared ministry” that inspired her to sign the membership book.

Two years later, she took a class in Ecological Ethics at Wesley Seminary. At GA that year she heard about environmental ministry and met (our own) Leslie Pohl-Kosbau! The link from environmental ethics to a theology of ecology became her path to community ministry. She graduated from Starr King, was ordained in 2003 and moved home to Portland in 2005.

About her environmental concerns she says, “We may already be too late to change the planet’s course,” but her hope lies in two factors: one, “the evidence of resilience we can learn from indigenous peoples,” and two, that “resilience can best be maintained in community.”

We are very fortunate Katherine chose to be part of our community!

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