

## Embracing Change Diane Cartwright

The song we sing every week to begin services at All Faiths ends with the verse: "Don't be afraid of some change." Doug, my husband, always changed the words (silently, of course), to "Don't be afraid of some currency" or "Don't be afraid of some checks"; but that was when he was All Faiths' treasurer, and now that he's Stewardship Chair, he is even worse; and to tell the truth he'll probably still be doing it when he retires from his current position. I think he's trying to modify it currently to "Don't be afraid of your Required Minimum Distribution." Once money-conscious, always money-conscious. But I love him all the same.

It's a standard belief that once we get older, we become more resolute in resisting change. Since I refuse to grow older, I haven't noticed that particular trait in myself; but as a keen observer of everything around me, I believe that it just might be true--in other people, of course. But the passage of time offers opportunities which remaining fixed does not.

The perception of change is, at best, elusive. I used to ask students to interpret the phrase, "A rolling stone gathers no moss." It's a well-known adage which offers implied advice about how to live your life. Even in the slow-paced Neanderthal life of twenty or thirty years ago when I was teaching, the answers from students were very interesting.

Almost everyone interpreted the adage as recommending to people to keep moving, keep progressing, so that you wouldn't be a victim of stagnation, symbolized by ugly green or brown moss clinging to your sad carcass, which obviously couldn't keep up with the changes of modern life.

The original meaning of the adage was exactly the opposite. It suggested that you should slow down, put down roots, establish friendships, resist fads, surround yourself with family-- those were the rewards of a life well-lived, the embracing and nurturing moss which you were entitled to and which gave meaning to your life.

This example of how an adage has changed in its perceived meaning is very telling; and it has particular importance as we look at All Faiths - our future and our past.

Joyce Ramay in her sermon last month delved into the changes that All Faiths has undergone in the sixteen years since our founding. She has been a part of our existence from the beginning and offered a comprehensive view of our founding and growth.

Many of you in the audience have also played vital roles in All Faiths' history and could offer your own perspectives.

But now as we stand on the threshold of welcoming a new settled minister, CJ McGregor, to begin his journey with All Faiths, perhaps it is wise to stop, take a breath, and take stock how we want to embrace change rather than resist it, or quite possibly, to resist change while also embracing it.

That may seem to be a contradiction, but the first thing that comes to mind is that embracing change offers vast opportunities to become involved - to change the players as it were, rather than change the process necessarily.

When Doug and I decided to join All Faiths in 2002, we had not set foot in a church since high school other than to attend weddings or funerals.

We were welcomed and made to feel at home by people we saw as kindred spirits, and people who lived the words we say every week, "whoever you are, wherever you are on your spiritual journey, and whomever you choose to love, you are welcome here."

At the persuasive invitation of Wayne Robinson we soon found ourselves waist deep in running the Services Support Council. That led to a board appointment, other committee assignments, and eventually to Board officer involvements. But it also led to feelings of accomplishment in both of us that reaffirmed our latent spiritual faith, long dormant over all the years. We were involved in changing some things, of course; but we also preserved some time-honored procedures.

And it led to something else equally as important. We made friends in a new state far removed from the isolation of the world of teaching in Indiana, a world which we had known for 35 years. We have socialized, traveled, attended plays, staged productions at church, organized events - all with the new friends we met through All Faiths.

We also have found ways to have a larger voice in a world changing so fast and in ways that sometimes are very frightening. This was a change for both of us. As teachers we were advised to keep our personal beliefs and opinions to ourselves. Living in a Christian and politically conservative community, we found taking that advice rather difficult. We had shared our political thoughts with our own group of like-minded Indiana friends. But once we found All Faiths, we realized we were free to speak out. We had moved to another politically and religiously conservative community to be sure, but All Faiths provided a liberally religious haven that treasured diversity. Locally with this congregation and nationally with UU's everywhere, we have been able to stand together supported by the vision and mission of this congregation who stands up for justice and who stands on the side of love.

We learned that "ministry" does not just come from one who is ordained. We are in relationship here, ministering to each other and the world with kindness and compassion.

In other words, we gathered moss; and in so doing, enriched our own lives as well as contributing to our church family.

As I reach the last year of my presidency, I am fully aware of how much All Faiths has given me; and I want to enjoin you to embrace the opportunities as well. We have opportunities for involvements galore, and it sometimes feels daunting to dive in. Sometimes it also seems that the establishment is a closed clique of people who have held onto positions forever, barring the way to anyone new. But if you're asked, or even if you're not asked, make your voices heard.

Follow the examples of Jen Eversole, a new member who joined the board as secretary last month; Lee Page, a recent new member who chaired the search committee so efficiently; Ensign Cowell who is co-heading the Climate Committee with Joan Marshall; Karen Grabia, whose efforts on green sanctuary are bearing fruit; Steve Pinnisi who is lending his design talent with the Communication Committee to create a new logo; Susan Meissner, Patricia Sala, and Werner Stocker, who during our transition were among our members who contributed guest sermons to enthusiastic reviews; Kendra Maroon and Annely Hudanick, two more who gave inspiring sermons, also worked tirelessly to put on quality dinner theater *fun*-raising events; Joe Hill, whose fantastic photography graced the Community Room recently; and Chris Stotler who brings clarity and a

studied view to the Finance Committee. These people and many, many more too numerous to mention (and I apologize to those I've left out) have all embraced change and have put themselves forward not only to enrich their own lives, but to bring the moss to All Faiths.

And *nearly all* of them are All Faiths members who have not been members since our founding, but who joined later. Even relatively new members, such as Judith Alberda, who comes often to water plants and tend landscaping, and Judy Whitcomb, who has taken an active role on the Membership Committee, immediately decided to share their gifts and the responsibility in caring for our congregation. One of the best ways new members can get to know us is by choosing to be a greeter, and many of you have. You speak to everyone and see every nametag. Thanks to every one of you.

Last year the Board voted to recognize a congregant or congregants who had contributed to All Faiths over the course of our existence.

We wanted, in a small way, to recognize these people who have worked tirelessly in various capacities over time to make All Faiths a place where we all feel we are at home.

So far we've recognized the following people: Joyce Schaffer, Joyce Raimay, Lou and Barb Pizzini, Pat and Bob Nuding, Carol Siferd, Carol and Ed Elrod, and Edith Rood.

These people have worked to make All Faiths great by contributing to its history - a history which is replete with constancy over the years, but is also marked by the change of evolving ideas and characters. Each person brings his or her own voice, talent, and strength to the workings of this spiritual community. I feel truly grateful to be part of this loving congregation who is so generous with all their gifts.

As our front sculpture reminds us, we are all of us each others' keeper, and we do so by bolstering and reinforcing the tenets that make our Unitarian Universalism strong. Sharon Gray recently posted some words on Facebook from the Reverend Erin Wathen who wrote about volunteering at church. Rev. Wathen was uncomfortable with the term "volunteer." In her view it is not the best word to describe what one does for the church. She says none of us is a volunteer in our home. I translated that to mean that

at home we do not “volunteer” to watch the kids, to mow the grass, or to pay the bills. We have a shared responsibility with our family, at home and at church.

The point is that we do not just belong to this church, All Faiths, this place belongs to us. We do not “volunteer” as much as we minister to each other and to this place. We have a shared ministry here.

The Reverend CJ McGregor joins us in this shared ministry next week. His first Sunday with us causes me to recall the first day of school as a teacher. I always felt a nervous excitement. It is a day of first impressions and getting to know each other. I realize that I have only one person to get to know better next Sunday. CJ will have a room full. Be sure to identify yourself and to wear your nametags. May we remember that as we enter into relationship with him, we do so with openness, patience, good intentions, forgiveness, and love.

Let me suggest that as we welcome CJ as our new minister, we also embrace change in this dawning of a new era as all of us look inside of ourselves to see what we can offer to All Faiths in time, treasure, and talent, vowing to bring a little measure of moss to our lives here on earth.

May it be so.

Thank you to Doug...to Bill...to John...and to Sharon....

For the closing words today allow me to share this story by UU minister, Christopher Buice. It can remind us how we can make ourselves and those around us comfortable with change.

## THE FROG PRINCE

There once was a little girl who was walking beside a creek when she happened to see a frog that looked very sad. "I wonder why that frog is so sad?" she asked herself. Then she remembered a story once told by her mother about how a girl had kissed a frog and how the frog had magically turned into a handsome prince. "Maybe that is why the frog is so sad. No one will kiss it so that it can become a prince."

She decided that she would give the frog a kiss herself. But nothing happened. There was still just a frog sitting in her hand. She set the frog back on the ground and said, "Poor froggy, I'm sorry I couldn't turn you into a handsome prince."

The frog replied, "Oh, but you have done something far better. You have made me a happier frog." And the frog hopped off with a great big smile on his face.

So, if you're walking through the woods one day and happen to see a little girl picking up frogs and kissing them, don't try to stop her. She knows what she is doing. Frogs need love, too, you know.

You may not be able to see the frog change on the outside, but, believe me, a little love and attention makes everyone feel like royalty on the inside.

Source: "A Bucketful of Dreams: Contemporary Parables for All Ages" (Skinner House, 1994) *out of print*

Let us go together for cookies, coffee, and conversation in the community room or out on our revived deck.

Go in peace. Always go in love.