

Reflections on Sacred Activism

Please indulge me, as this month's writing is going to be a little bit of a ramble.

You may have heard me say before that as a child my two great heroes were Robin Hood and Saint Francis of Assisi. I've always had what author Rafael Sabatini would refer to as "an overdeveloped sense of justice", shocked and dismayed at situations that were just unfair, and driven beyond the point of rationality to want to do something about them.

I've always been a person of deep empathy, even when I try to be too cool and beyond showing compassion. Even during my self-centered, fairly arrogant teenage years and early 20's I was always moved quite deeply by the suffering and struggles of other people and animals.

Perhaps this came from being raised by a mother who was an immigrant, who had lived under the Nazis and been liberated by American troops, and a father whose parents were grateful, successful immigrants. Perhaps it was my Catholic upbringing and Christian education — most likely it was a combination of all of those things. But whatever the foundation, I've always been pushed by something deep inside me to do what I can to further the cause of justice.

In some ways this is what drove me to become an activist, starting in Middle School, activities that have continued well into my adulthood and still exist. I've been involved in the anti-war movement, the Civil Rights Movement, women's rights, workers rights, animal welfare, immigration, environmental action, and homeless ministries. I have found that the work is never done.

And of course with so much to focus upon — in my last sermon, I kept reiterating how much work there is to do — it can become distracting and overwhelming to see how much suffering there is in the world and how much needs to be set right. We can become hopeless and feel powerless — and those are very real risks for activists.

I found a great piece of wisdom in the writings of one of my teachers, Andrew Harvey, who advises that we pick an area of focus and that's where to dedicate and invest our time and energy.



He asks the question: "What's the one thing that keeps you up at night, the one thing that wakes you up in the middle of the night and breaks your heart?"

That's where you begin.

I'm not one of those people who thinks that it isn't sufficient to merely write a check and go back to your life, because as a consultant who has worked with many non-profits in the past, I know how vital fundraising and development can be to the survival of a mission and charitable work. At the same time, I know that if one feels deeply about an issue and does not show up if at all possible, that a great opportunity has been missed. Not merely an opportunity to further a cause and help render justice, but an opportunity to step into the role that God has designated for us. We are the tangible and effective hands, feet and voice of God in the world. We are the way that God shows up.

I think it's crucial that if you hear the small, still voice of God nudging and pinching you, prodding you to show up and be counted, you should do so. That still voice is the Holy Spirit.

One needn't go far afield to get involved — there are nitty-gritty, close to home needs of people who are suffering right now in our own communities. When we show up, we make a difference. By sharing our time, our concern, our resources, as well as our money, we do make a difference. And we make sure that God does show up.

Theologically, you probably know me well enough by now to know that I'm not talking about a guy in a beard when I say it's "God" that shows up. It's really us who do the 'goding'. We're the ones who make and donate food, who sit with grieving people, sign and send along petitions, who go door-to-door, who staff the picket lines and the protests, and the street actions that obstruct commerce and traffic. Because sometimes that is what it takes.

In a time of creeping fascism, protesting may not be enough. And what may be required is that some may need to put safety and life on the line, or make themselves available for arrest. In some ways that's a privilege. Not everyone can afford time off from work, jail time, court costs, legal fees, etc. So this is not a call for martyrdom. But make no mistake about it, it is a call to action.



Continued...

The world is crying out for our participation and needs healing. And that is not anything of which we are incapable.

I saw a bumper sticker about 10 years ago and it has stayed with me since then. It said "Compassion is Revolution". Think about that for a moment. In a world where we are constantly told that success, status, wealth, and fulfillment are the be-all and end-all of existence, something inside us knows that this is not true. Showing compassion to others is the opposite of what our capitalist society would have us do. Power structures do not like it when their messages of might and control are subverted by love. Just think of Jesus vs the Roman Empire...

And when we do practice and exhibit compassion, our divine natures come alive and we are made whole.

Again, my teacher Andrew Harvey tells a wonderful story in his introduction to his amazing book "*The Hope: A Guide To Sacred Activism*":

'A plump Indian businessman, dripping with gold and diamonds, came one day to visit Mother Teresa, fell at her feet, and proclaimed "Oh my God, you are the holiest of the Holy! You are the super-holy one! You have given up everything! I cannot even give up one samosa for breakfast! Not one single chapatti for lunch can I give up!"

Mother Teresa started to laugh so hard her attendant nuns grew scared (she was in her middle eighties and frail from two recent heart attacks). Eventually, she stopped laughing and, wiping her eyes with one hand, with the other she leaned forward to help her adorer up from his knees.

She said to him quietly: "So you say I have given up everything?" The businessman nodded enthusiastically. Mother Teresa smiled. "Oh, my dear man" she said, "you are so wrong. It isn't I who have given up everything, it is you. You have given up the supreme sacred joy of life, the source of all lasting happiness, the joy of giving your life away to other beings, to serve the Divine in them with compassion. It is you who are the great renunciate!" To the Indian businessman's total bewilderment, Mother Teresa got down on her knees and bowed to him. Flinging up his hands, he ran out of the room...¹

Let me finish with one of my favorite sayings from the *Pirkei Avot*, part of the *Mishnah* (the first text of Jewish oral law) Rabbi Tarfon used to say: "It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it."

What else could "Love one another" possibly mean?

Peace & Light to each of you,

Rev. 

¹ *The Hope: A Guide To Sacred Activism*, Andrew Harvey, Copyright © Hay House, Inc., 2009



Have you read...?
Rev. Jack's reading recommendation for the month!

The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe

by Richard Rohr, 2019 SPCK Publishing

Drawing on scripture, history, and spiritual practice, Franciscan priest and teacher Richard Rohr articulates a transformative view of Jesus Christ as a portrait of God's constant, unfolding work in the world. "God loves things by becoming them," he writes, and Jesus's life was meant to declare that humanity has never been separate from God — except by its own negative choice. When we recover this fundamental truth, faith becomes less about proving Jesus was God, and more about learning to recognize the Creator's presence all around us, and in everyone we meet.

Thought-provoking, practical, and full of deep hope and vision, *The Universal Christ* is a landmark book from one of our most beloved spiritual writers, and an invitation to contemplate how God liberates and loves all that is.



Your prayers are requested for...

- † Betsy, who has ALS; Marsha, who is in hospice; Paul and Libby, who lost a son to a drug overdose; Cody Eisenring, Jeanne Martin's friend's son who is on life support; Eli Richards, 3 year old son of Rev. Jack's clergy friend who is recovering from brain surgery; Rev. Douglas Stivison who is recovering from eye surgery; Dave Beesley, who has cancer; Frank Hoefle; Megan Shaw, Tammy's daughter; Vince Aiosa, Dan Taylor
- † Victims of abuse, accidents, neglect, terrorism, weather extremes, pain
- † Those suffering from addiction, depression, anxiety
- † Those who are hungry and homeless
- † Families being torn apart and children kept in cages in our name

If you'd like your request to be continued, please feel free to call the office (201-384-1063).

Youth / Pentecost / Sunday, June 9th

The last day of Sunday School culminated with a packed Sanctuary gathered for worship, jointly led by our Youth and Rev. Jack. Director Emma Nathanson reported on the school year as follows: Mission efforts raised \$750 for the Center for Food Action through their Sunshine Bank collection; for Heifer International's *Fill The Ark*, the children raised \$564, enough to purchase a Gardeners Gift Basket, 2 Goats, and a Bunch of Bunnies, all of which will go to families in need around the world who will promise to share their gift with neighbors.



The theme of the year was prayer and the highlight for director Emma Nathanson was the morning where the students each wrote down a prayer concern and the children traded lists and went off to pray about their friends' concerns. The culmination of their work was the creation of beautiful jars for everyone in the congregation with prayer starters on popsicle sticks.





Children are ready to start worship while their families and loved ones look on with pride and joy



*Left to right:
Jillian Montello, Hannah Nathanson and Kyle Quayle participate in the worship service*



*Left to right:
Maya Nathanson, Hannah Nathanson, Blair Gardner, Jillian Montello, JJ Scherman, Juliet Scherman, Tommy Pavlos, Ava Pavlos, Avalon Davis—one by one read their prayers to the congregation*



*Left:
Director Emma Nathanson looks on while Blair Gardner reads her prayer and Ava Pavlos awaits her turn.*

*Right:
Congratulations to High School graduates Sabrina and Rachel Wilson*



Kimiko and Natalie Quayle Baptised June 9th



Kaitlyn Montello, Brody Davis, Natalie Quayle and Kimiko Quayle Confirmed June 9th

Gratitude for an amazing Youth/Pentecost Sunday!

Sunday, June 9th was really amazing: so much grace poured out upon us all, so many blessings, and so much joy.

I want to personally thank so many people who helped make it all come together: Emma, Jeanne, Jen, Jackie, Dean, Qin, Suzanne, Olga, Leigh, Jane; our Confirmands Kimi, Natalie, Brody, and Kaitlyn; their families and their mentors, Alice, Nancy, Christine, and Liz — plus all the folks who brought such yummy food! (I want the recipe for that beet salad...). I'm sure I'm leaving someone out, as I was upstairs and there were definitely some kitchen heroes.

It truly takes a village, and this congregation is one sturdy village. I am blessed to serve such a fine-hearted church family!

Peace & Light,

Rev. 

***If you've ever wondered where those cookies
we bake at Christmas GO...***

*They're delivered by Nicholas A. Montello, PhD
Director, Division of Family Guidance*

Bergen County Division of Family Guidance
Helping caregivers and their families with caring for their loved ones
Bergen County Juvenile Detention Center
Bergen's Place Youth Shelter
Visions Transitional Living Program

The Division of Family Guidance is Bergen County's resource for youth and families in need. It provides clinical, residential, educational, correctional, case management and monitoring services to at-risk children, adolescents, and families, particularly those who are otherwise unable to receive needed services.

The youth complex opened in 2013 and has 26 programs in all, serving about 2,000 families a year. On the campus in Teterboro is the **Juvenile Detention Center, Bergen's Place Youth Shelter**, and an alternative school program for out-of-district students.

Bergen's Place Youth Shelter is a state licensed residential crisis and homeless shelter for youth ages 11 through 17. Runaway, homeless and at-risk youth may access the program on a walk-in or referral basis 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The program addresses youths' immediate

needs, including food, clothing, health and mental wellbeing. Bergen's Place is a safe and welcoming environment for LGBTQ youth.

The **Visions Transitional Living Program** is located on the third floor at a newly renovated building (built in 1929) at 125 Essex Street in Hackensack. Visions is a transitional living program that provides a residence for young people who lack the skills to live completely independently in the community. The program serves a population of 16 and a half to 21 year old male and female residents who have no place else to live. In addition to a residence, clients are provided with academic, psychological and vocational support. The first and second floors are home to a number of outpatient programs including both counseling and recreation programs. Those programs serve ages 13 through 22.

For more information go to <http://www.co.bergen.nj.us/divisions-of-family-guidance>



Bergen County Caregiver:

"When traveling alone, you are not alone! I am here to help you!"



The classroom is not the only thing that is empty over the summer.

Nourish a child with your gift and join the fight against summer hunger!

**For many low-income families, when classrooms are empty,
bellies are empty too.**

School is out for the summer, and many of us are planning for fun, sunny vacations, time down the shore, or days spent at the park. It is hard to imagine that there are also many northern New Jersey parents who, instead of fun-in-the-sun, are worrying how to feed their children when school meals aren't available.

Hard working Bergen and Passaic county families turn to the **Center for Food Action** to help make ends meet during the summer months. This increase in need coincides with a time of year when pantry shelves are typically not full.

Won't you please help fight summer hunger? Your gift will help CFA provide area kids with healthy, nutritious meals this summer.

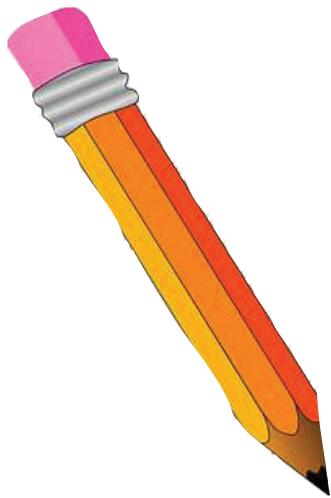
**Thanks to a generous gift from a private donor, your gift can be doubled.
All gifts made before July 24, 2019 will be doubled up to \$5,000.**



Mission Outreach
& Social Action (MOSA)

**STRENGTHEN
 THE CHURCH
 OFFERING**

Thank you for your contributions to the UCC Strengthen The Church Special Offering. We will be sending off \$430 to the UCC very soon, fulfilling our "Five for Five obligation."



Wanted & Welcomed!

This newsletter welcomes all church members to submit poems, articles, or quotes that you would like to share with other members. Your input is greatly encouraged. Please do not hesitate to email the church (ucchaworth@verizon.net) or Jen Chin directly (jenchin@aol.com). Thank you!

Heads up...

In just a few more weeks, we will be launching a Capital Improvement Fund and will need your support!



One of the great joys of being a part of this congregation is the sense of ownership and pride that comes along with it. As members of the UCC, we are blessed with relative autonomy in our affairs and practice complete transparency and accountability when it comes to our finances.

With ownership, of course, comes responsibility. We have been blessed with a fine church home where we gather to celebrate our faith. Like any home, this one requires a degree of upkeep from time to time. In recent years we have restored the spire (steeple), upgraded our sound system, completely repaved the parking lot and repaired the elevator, to name but a few recent improvements.

To ensure that our home continues to serve as a safe, suitable and welcoming place to gather and worship, we will be launching a Capital Improvement Fund. This fund is specifically dedicated to the maintenance and upkeep of our collective home, helping assure that we preserve our operational resources. In the following weeks we will be taking a special offering to grow the fund. We would love to see 100% participation from our church family — any donation will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your attention and participation.



Due to dwindling membership & considerable overlap, our Women's Fellowship & our Friday Group (affectionately called The Lunch Bunch) have merged into one small group, meeting formally the first Friday of each month, September through June and informally on all other Fridays throughout the year.



Unless otherwise noted, please bring a sandwich to share at the monthly meetings and whatever you like at the weekly get-togethers. Lunch Bunch knitting, crocheting, and coupon-cutting will continue as always, as will the usual rotation of providing dessert.

Anyone wishing to join us will be most welcome!

...and speaking of coupons

*I*t may or may not be known that for many years — first the Missions Ministry, then Women's Fellowship, then the Lunch Bunch—we ladies have been cutting grocery coupons weekly and shipping them off to a rotating list of 8 to 10 military bases for families' use. Rarely do we receive a reply, but very recently the following came to us:

"...I want to personally thank you for the coupons that we received for our Service Members and their families. Your time and energy in gathering, cutting up, separating, and sending the coupons is extremely supportive.

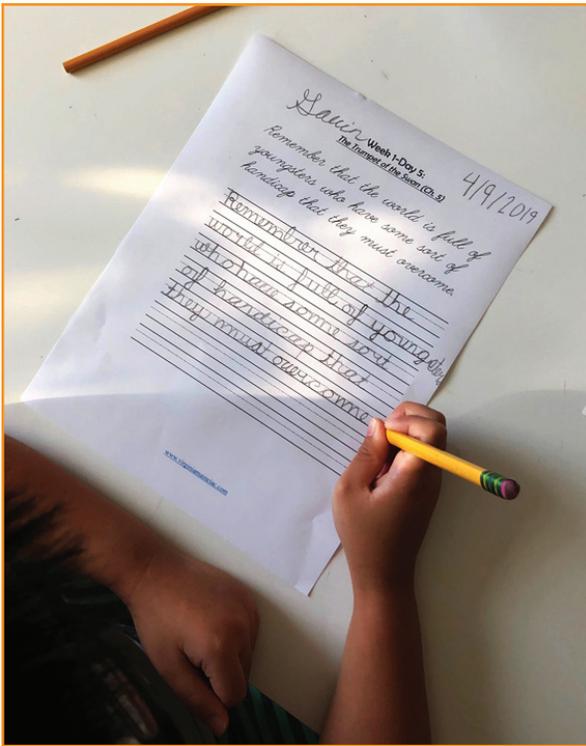
When far away from home, it can be difficult for our families to find coupons for use at the Commissary and Post Exchange and shopping on the local German economy can be expensive. We encourage financial readiness in our community, and your efforts help the Service Members SAVE!

Thank you again for your thoughtfulness. It is very much appreciated."

Merilee K. Nevins, AFC
Financial Readiness Specialist
Army Emergency Relief Officer
Army Community Service
Bldg. 2915, Panzer Kaserne
USAG Stuttgart

from Jen Chin...

Below: My 8-year old adopted "grand-nephew" learning to write in script along with a life lesson in kindness and understanding.



This is what he's writing: ***"Remember that the world is full of youngsters who have some sort of handicap that they must overcome."***



Health & School Kits Collection

The ladies of the church have been assembling both school kits and health kits, ten each for many years for delivery to Church World Service's distribution and aid. We will be continuing this traditon and would love to send MORE kits than the usual ten.

If you would like to participate, there is a poster plus leaflets with all information in Fellowship Hall alongside a collection bin. ALL CONTRIBUTIONS to the cause will be gratefully accepted!



The minister was preoccupied with thoughts of how he was going to ask the congregation to come up with more money than they were expecting for repairs to the church building. **Then he was annoyed** to find that the regular organist was sick and a substitute had been brought in at the last minute. The substitute wanted to know what to play. "Here's a copy of the service" he said impatiently. "But, you'll have to think of something to play after I make the announcement about the finances." During the service, the minister paused and said, "Brothers and Sisters, we are in great difficulty; the roof repairs cost twice as much as we expected and we need \$4,000 more. Any of you who can pledge \$100 or more, please stand up". At that moment, the substitute organist played the "NATIONAL ANTHEM." And that is how the substitute became the regular organist!



July Birthdays

- 1** Ann Fay
- 2** Jeanne Martin
- 10** Jen Chin
- 13** Suzanne Renaud
- 22** Dorothy Blakeman
- 27** Rita Negrón Maslanek
- 29** Frank Osmer
Dean Pavlos

Oh sure! Just sit there watching your football while I go to church on my own again!





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