

*The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence. One cannot help but be in awe when contemplating the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery each day.*

—“Old Man’s Advice to Youth: ‘Never Lose a Holy Curiosity.’” *LIFE Magazine* (2 May 1955, p. 64)

## Curiosity Is Holy

### Welcome

Rev. Clare L. Petersberger

### The Covenant

—*First Parish of Norwell Unitarian Universalists*

**WE PLEDGE TO WALK TOGETHER  
IN FELLOWSHIP AND LOVE,  
TO CULTIVATE REVERENCE,  
TO PROMOTE SPIRITUAL GROWTH  
AND ETHICAL COMMITMENT,  
TO MINISTER TO EACH OTHER’S NEEDS  
AND TO THOSE OF HUMANITY,  
TO CELEBRATE THE SACRED MOMENTS OF LIFE’S  
PASSAGE,  
AND TO HONOR THE HOLINESS AT THE HEART OF BEING.**

### Opening Words

“In the Beginning” from *Instructions in Joy*

Rev. Nancy Schaffer

This month, we are reflecting on the question “What does it mean to be a people of curiosity?” The Reverend Nancy Schaffer offers the following poem about a people of curiosity— young students in a classroom.

Kate is teaching the kids about dinosaur air.

“That air you breathe—  
that air you have inside you  
every time you take a breath—  
that’s dinosaur air,” she says.

“Dinosaurs breathed it.”

[The poem continues, describing the wide-eyed children deeply inhaling the air once breathed by dinosaurs. As the teacher explains that we must take care of the air because it is all the air we will ever have, the kids’ breaths become shallower. But the teacher isn’t finished with today’s wondrous lesson. She tells the kids that “we’re all cousins,” that we began as cousins way long ago, and the kids, delighted in their new kinship, relish their breaths of dinosaur air and hail each other as “cousin.”]

## Chalice Lighting

(Read responsively)

Adapted from Rev. Deane Oliva

We light this chalice for mothers and mothering;

**TO CELEBRATE THOSE  
WHO HAVE TAKEN ON THE TASK  
OF NURTURING A YOUNG ONE—  
BABY, CHILD, OR YOUTH—  
INTO ADULTHOOD;**

to celebrate those who have nourished the light of truth and compassion in growing minds and hearts;

**TO CELEBRATE THOSE WHO HAVE COMMITTED  
TIME, MONEY, ENERGY TO THE GROWTH OF OTHERS  
IN THIS WORLD;**

to celebrate those who taught us to ask questions, who taught us that curiosity is holy.

**WE LIGHT THIS CHALICE TO CELEBRATE AND HOLD  
DEAR THIS FLAME OF LOVE.**

## Prelude

“Lighten Up”

Suryan Stettner and Emilie Lorentzen

Tracy Hall and Amy Koren, vocals

## Story

*Harold and the Purple Crayon*

Crockett Johnson

[Story summary: One evening a boy named Harold decided to go for a walk in the moonlight. A problem immediately presented itself: there was no moon. But fortunately for Harold, a solution was at hand. Or rather, in hand, because in his hand, Harold held a purple crayon. He drew a fine quarter moon. And then, because he also needed a path to walk on, he used his purple crayon to draw a path, a straight path on which he would not get lost.

Soon he drew a short cut to a forest, but because he didn't want to get lost in the forest, he drew a woodland with only one tree. It was an apple tree. Musing about how delicious the apples would be when they ripened, Harold quickly drew a dragon to guard the tree, a dragon so fierce it scared even Harold, whose crayon-wielding hand accidentally drew a long wavy line.

Waves! Harold was in the ocean, saving himself by drawing a little boat. He sailed the boat until he was ready to come ashore, when he easily drew the beach on which he could picnic. He drew a perfect picnic—all his favorite kinds of pie—and when he had eaten his fill, he drew some animals to enjoy the leftovers.

His adventures with his purple crayon continued. Wanting to see where he was, he drew a mountain, and when he tumbled from the mountain, he quickly drew a balloon and a basket to break his fall and allow him to search for his home and his bedroom window.

He didn't see his house, so he drew one, a house with windows. He drew a building full of windows, a city of buildings with windows, but none of these windows was his window.

Needing to ask for help, he drew a policeman, who pointed along the way Harold was already going. And then, Harold remembered that when there was a moon, his bedroom window was always right around it. And so he drew his bedroom window, and his bed, and, dropping his purple crayon, Harold fell asleep.]

## **Song**

“The Rainbow Connection”

Paul Williams/Kenneth L. Ascher

Soloists, Choir, and Congregation

## **Meditation**

“Wondrous”

Sarah Freligh

Mother's Day is complicated. There's gratitude for those who mothered us comforted and encouraged us, nurtured and stood by us and pointed us along life's way. There's gratitude for those among us who are mothering, caring for the next generation of human beings and encouraging their curiosity about what it means to be human.

There's also grief for mothers who have died, for mothers who could not love us in the ways we needed, and for those whose longing for children was never met. A colleague shared a poem, this week that captures the complexity of grief and gladness when we think about mothers and mothering.

I invite us to join in the spirit of meditation with words by Sarah Freligh entitled, “Wondrous.”

[In this poem, a radio announcer talking about the birthday of E. B. White sends the narrator back to her past, recalling her mother reading ‘Charlotte's Web’ to her and her sister. Though her mother has read the lines about Charlotte laying her eggs and dying five times before, she is unable to read about Charlotte's death without crying.

The narrator recalls that, as children, she and her sister are  
“ . . . laughing at her because we know nothing of loss and its sad math,  
how every subtraction is exponential, how each grief  
multiplies the one preceding it . . .”

She notes that even White was unable to write his words, “she died alone” without tears, though the spider Charlotte was his own creation.

The poem concludes with the narrator remembering—hearing—her

“ . . . mother’s voice  
ten years after the day she died — the catch, the rasp,  
the gathering up before she could say to us, I’m OK.”]

## **Musical Interlude**

“La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin”

Claude Debussy

Roxanne MacKinnon, piano

## **Bridging Ceremony**

Today, we are bridging Roxanne MacKinnon, Kyra Mahoney, and Emma Shannon, who will be graduating from high school in a few short weeks. We call this a bridging ceremony because a bridge invited the traveler to journey away from home. At the same time, the bridge is planted in the homeland as well as the new territory, so the connection is not severed, only stretched.

Emma, Kya, and Roxanne, while part of the purpose of this ceremony is to encourage you to spread your wings and fly, another part is to invite you to remember that your roots are here—and we hope you will return to visit us often. Roxanne’s father, Dean, has created a slide show to help us all remember how dear you are to our hearts.

## **Slide Show**

Created by Dean MacKinnon

## **Walking the Bridge**

### **Reflections**

Roxanne MacKinnon

Kyra Mahoney

Emma Shannon

[The texts of the reflections of our bridging seniors are not available.]

## **Reflections about our High School Seniors**

Letter from Jen Larson

Delivered by Joyce Duncan

My most memorable memories of Roxanne were from our West Virginia service trip. The teens all rode down in my car, so I got to enjoy their music and conversation on the drive. Roxanne introduced me to Vampire Weekend and a lot of other music I’d never heard of before. I was the nominal work party lead for a group painting a house that was close to three stories on one side, built into a hill, and it was Roxanne who was fearlessly at the top of our tallest ladder, outstretched to paint as much as humanly possible. Roxanne has an amazing work ethic, always helping to clean up at the end of a long work day, and that is something I very much admire.

Emma is a conundrum of incredibly chill, while also being driven and talented. During an evening session at

the church we were playing some kind of game, me very competitively, and Emma made me a certificate for “whatever place I wanted.” And who can forget her ode to pineapples? When the teens put on a YRUU service, there would invariably be someone who showed up the day of to participate and Emma was the person to seamlessly incorporate them and make sure they knew what was going on. It may have been her trying to get out of some speaking roles, but it was also her inclusion.

## **Words from Advisors**

[Text not available]

## **Presentation of Gifts**

Emma, Roxanne, and Kyra, we have intentionally given you opportunities to explore your UU faith and tools to put that faith into action. We encourage you to seek connections with other Unitarian Universalists wherever you may go—people like soon-to-be Goucher graduate Kate Longabaugh!

We trust you know you will always have a home to return to here. So like Harold, who left home to explore the world and create the world he dreamt of before returning to his window framing the moon, we give you a box of purple crayons. Let us bless our graduating seniors, their curiosity, their care, their creativity, and their dreams by joining in the responsive reading printed in your order of service.

## **Responsive Blessing**

Spirit of Life,

**THE GATHERED MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THIS  
CONGREGATION ASK YOU TO BLESS KYRA, ROXANNE,  
AND EMMA AS THEY GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL  
AND ENTER ADULTHOOD.**

Bless them with good health and strong hearts.

**BLESS THEM WITH SAFETY AND WITH GOOD AND  
LOYAL FRIENDS.**

Bless them with wisdom and clear-sightedness.

**BLESS THEM WITH A VISION FOR THEIR FUTURE  
AND WITH THE STRENGTH AND STAMINA  
TO PURSUE THAT VISION.**

Bless them with ability to know when they must do this alone, to know when they will need the help of others,

And to ask for that help—knowing they will someday return the favor.

**BLESS THEM WITH TIMES OF RELAXATION, HAPPINESS,  
AND JOY.**

Bless them with love, with hope, with generosity, and with faith.

**BLESS THEM WITH ALL THAT WE CAN GIVE THEM,  
AND ALL THEY WILL OFFER BACK TO THE WORLD.**

## **Recognition of Youth Advisors**

Joyce Duncan  
[Text not available]

## **Offertory**

“For Just a Little While”  
Sally Albrecht  
Judi Clague, soprano; TUUC Choir; Tracy Hall, piano

## **Homily**

*Curiosity Is Holy*  
Rev. Clare L. Petersberger

A few months ago, my mother was reading a book with her youngest grandson. It was not *Charlotte's Web*. It was a book with illustrations. My mother would read a line and then she'd ask her grandson what he saw; what he thought of a bug barely visible in the grass at the bottom of the page; or what was happening up in the right-hand corner. I watched and listened as they took a leisurely stroll through the words of the story stopping to wonder about and discuss the illustrations.

If my mother had been sharing the story of *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, she probably would have had him study the drawings and asked, “What is Harold doing here? And then what happened? And then what did Harold draw?” She would have had her grandson tell most of the story himself just by wondering about the illustrations.

Much is made of how, when children are four years old, they ask up to 75 questions an hour. My mother doesn't ask 75 questions when she reads to her grandsons, but she does model that curiosity is a good thing. And I am reminded how my mother lifted up the importance of curiosity when teaching Bible in a Unitarian Universalist Sunday School class. For my mother, the story of Adam and Eve, the serpent, and the apple was not a cautionary tale about the dangers of curiosity. No, she was excited to point out that people were asking “Big” questions! “Why do we humans experience pain? Why do we suffer? Why do we die?” This story offered answers to these “Big” questions.

Similarly, when teaching Greek history and mythology to high school students, my mother saw the story of Pandora not as a dire warning against the curiosity, but rather, a myth to make sense not only of the presence of sickness and death in the world, but also of hope. For my mother, curiosity is a core value.

This is no small thing. The British author Ian Leslie reminds us that curiosity has not always been nurtured and encouraged—especially by powers-that-be in religion and politics. He writes: “Early Christian theologians railed against curiosity: Saint Augustine claimed that ‘God fashioned hell for the inquisitive.’ Even humanist philosopher Erasmus suggested that curiosity was greed by a different name. For most of Western history, it has been regarded as at best a distraction, at worst a poison, corrosive to the soul and to society.” Ian Leslie

concludes: “There’s a reason for this. Curiosity is unruly. It doesn’t like rules, or, at least, it assumes that all rules are provisional, subject to the laceration of a smart question nobody has yet thought to ask . . . Pursuing it is liable to bring you into conflict with authority at some point, as everyone from Galileo to Charles Darwin to Steve Jobs could have attested.”

The curiosity of scientists from the Renaissance onwards advanced our understanding of the universe and our place in it. The quote extolling the value of curiosity at the top of your order of service is from an interview Einstein had with *LIFE* magazine in May of 1955. Einstein concluded his ruminations on curiosity with: “Never lose a holy curiosity.”

And yet, as we grow older, most of us do stop asking as many questions as we did when we were four. Part of this is because we have learned more about ourselves, others, and the world. Part of it is because we don’t want to risk appearing foolish to others, or fail at doing something new, or have our certainties challenged. I was reminded of this in our recent Soul Matters Sharing Circle. One of the questions that spoke to me was: “What is the greatest adventure that your curiosity took you on?”

Harold’s curiosity took him on a great adventure in creativity. What is the greatest adventure that your curiosity took you on? For me, it was auditing a class on astronomy at Johns Hopkins seven years ago with Professor Adam Reiss, who had discovered dark matter. In so doing, I was correcting a choice I had made shortly after graduating from high school. In the luck of the draw, my freshman college advisor happened to be an astronomy professor. He encouraged me to sign up for one of his courses. But I was certain I had not taken enough math and science courses in high school to be able to take an astronomy class in college. That was my personal certainty and this astronomy professor could not persuade me otherwise. After college, I’d often regretted that decision. So, in 2012, when the opportunity arose to explore the cosmos—I gladly showed up, not with a purple crayon, but with an open and inquisitive mind, lots of questions, and a raised hand.

Peter Marty wrote how the Catholic priest, Edward Hays “imagined the question mark as a holy symbol. Whereas the exclamation point is emphatic and insistent, the question mark is really a bent over exclamation point that has bowed its head in humility. Open to a spirit of exploration and wonder, the question mark is both a prayer tool for everyday people and a creative tool of artists, geniuses, and explorers.”

So to Roxanne, Kyra, and Emma, I hope you will follow your own question marks, your own holy curiosity and where it leads you. It’s our Unitarian Universalist way in religion— right there in our fourth principle— “the free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” This free and responsible search for truth and meaning can take us out of ourselves and remind us how we, who are breathing dinosaur air, are connected to other humans—our cousins— and to the interdependent web of all existence. The poet Li-Young Lee lifted up how curiosity is holy when he wrote:

[Poet describes living

“Between two unknowns . . .

Between my mother's hopes . . .

and my child's wishes . . .”

and wonders if it is a door between goodbyes, or a window interrupting eternity, and concludes “Yes, and a little singing between two great rests.”]

## **Closing Words**

From *Letters to a Young Poet*

Rainer Maria Rilke

Our closing words, by Rilke, are for people of curiosity. He advised:

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart, and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms, and like books in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then, gradually, without even noticing, live along some distant day into the answer.”

So may it be for us all as we go now in peace.