

**“I’m Glad You Asked That Question…”**  
**Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**  
**June 10, 2007**  
**Bruce A. Bode**

**Call to Worship**

Holy and beautiful is the custom by which we gather together on this concluding Sunday of the church year.

Here we come to give our thanks, to face our ideals, to remember our loved ones, to seek that which is permanent, and to serve goodness, beauty, and the qualities of life that make it rich and whole.

Through this hour breathes the worship of all ages, the cathedral music of all history, and blessed are the ears that hear that eternal sound.

**Lighting of Chalice** (spoken in unison)

We are travelers. We meet for a moment in this sacred place to love, to share, to serve. Let us use compassion, curiosity, reverence, and respect while seeking our truths. In this way we will support a just and joyful community, and this moment shall endure.

**A Litany of Recognition and Appreciation**

Our Responsive Reading this morning – the full-page insert in your bulletin – recognizes and expresses appreciation for the many persons who have contributed in various ways to this congregation during this past year.

When your position is named, would you please stand and then be seated again after the congregation recognizes you with their response. For some persons this may mean standing on more than one occasion, but I ask that you please do so.

Please join me in our Litany of Recognition and Appreciation:

**INTRODUCTION:** On this concluding Sunday of the church year, we recognize and appreciate those who have contributed to the well-being of this religious community this past year.

**MINISTER:** Choir director, Keyboardists, Music Program Committee Members, Choir Members, and all persons who have provided Special Music this past church year or who have helped with the music program, please stand as you are able:

**ALL:** For the music you play for us, the songs you sing to us, and the joy you bring us, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Religious Education Director, Religious Education Assistant, Youth Advisors, Teachers and Classroom Assistants, OWL Facilitators, Child-Care Providers, Religious Education Committee Members, and all who have worked with our children and young people in this past year, please stand as you are able:

ALL: For the time, skill, love, and care with which you bless our children and young people, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Office Administrator, Office Volunteers, Office Technology Committee Members, Newsletter Editor, Newsletter Proofreaders, Newsletter Assembly Team, and Webmaster, please stand as you are able:

ALL: For making our office a friendly and helpful place, for maintaining its computers, phones, and copiers, and for keeping us informed about the activities and programs of our Fellowship, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Membership Committee Members, Ushers, Greeters, Coffee & Tea Makers, and Sound Technicians, please stand as you are able:

ALL: For welcoming new persons into our Fellowship, for preparing our sanctuary for services and welcoming us to these services, and for your hospitality and good cheer before and following the services, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Cares & Concerns Committee Members, and all who have provided rides, meals, conversation, and visitation with fellow members and friends in times of physical, emotional, and spiritual need, please stand as you are able:

ALL: For extending your hearts and hands in creating the beloved community, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Governing Board Officers, Governing Board Members, Nominating Committee Members, and Program Council Attendees, please stand as you are able:

ALL: For your many hours spent attending to the complexities of this religious organization, and for your guidance and wisdom relating to the overall well-being of our congregation, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Finance Committee Members, Special Funds Committee Members, Stewardship Committee Members, Personnel Committee Members, Designated Offering Committee Members, Board Treasurer, and Assistant to the Treasurer, please stand as you are able:

ALL: For the love you show to this congregation through your care of our finances, and for your dedication and vision in preparing for future possibilities, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Sunday Service Committee Members, Committee on Ministry Members, Summer Speakers, and all who have presented in our worship services this past year, please stand as you are able:

ALL: For your efforts to make our Sunday gatherings times of spiritual refreshment and community celebration, and for your courage in sharing what is in your heart, of your soul, and on your mind, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Custodians, Members of the Building and Grounds Committee, the Aesthetics Committee, Lawn Mowers, Weed Warriors, Banner Makers, Banner Hangers, Flower Arrangers, Art Displayers, and all who have assisted with the upkeep and enhancement of our buildings and grounds this past year, please stand as you are able:

ALL: For your practical skill, physical labor, and artistic interest, and for your desire to make our church home both functional and pleasing to the eye, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Adult Learning Program Committee Members, Covenant Group Facilitators, Friendship Dinner Organizers and Providers, Librarian, and all who have facilitated and taught classes, led field trips, or been involved in providing adult programming for our congregation and the larger community, please stand as you are able:

ALL: For your willingness to share your skill and interest, and for your efforts to expand the mind, deepen the heart, and delight the senses, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Capital Campaign Committee Members, Building Design & Construction Committee Members, Building Steering Committee Members, and Building Project Task Force Members, please stand as you are able:

ALL: For your time and thought in planning for our future, and for your efforts to consider the good of the whole congregation and to involve them in this process, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Social Action and Education Committee Members, and all who have been involved in programs of congregational outreach to the larger community, such as Habitat for Humanity, the WAVE Food Drive, the Port Townsend-Bay St. Louis Sister City Project, Church Hosting for the Homeless, and “Queen for a Day,” please stand as you are able:

ALL: For your vision and will in connecting our congregation to our larger community and world, and for your belief that religion relates to justice and that faith fuses with action, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Children and Youth of this Fellowship, all those from infancy through high school age, please stand as you are able, and remain standing:

ALL: For your willingness to listen and inquire, to take in and reach out, and for the energy and enthusiasm you bring us, we express our thanks and praise.

MINISTER: Members and Friends of this congregation, and all present at this service, please stand as you are able:

ALL: For the faith, hope, love, and joy that comes from being together, singing together, learning together, planning together, wondering together, celebrating together, working together, visioning together, and serving together, we express our thanks and praise.

Please remain standing as we sing the verses of Hymn #128, "For All That Is Our Life"

### **Reading**

My reading this morning is for the onset of summer, an invitation to connect more directly with nature in all its depth and wonder. I read a poem of Mary Oliver from her book, Why I Wake Early. The poem is titled, "Where Does the Temple Begin, Where Does It End?"

There are things you can't reach. But  
you can reach out to them, and all day long.

The wind, the bird flying away. The idea of God.

And it can keep you as busy as anything else, and happier.

The snake slides away; the fish jumps, like a little lily,  
out of the water and back in; the goldfinches sing  
from the unreachable top of the tree.

I look; morning to night I am never done with looking.

Looking I mean not just standing around, but standing around  
as though with your arms open.

And thinking: maybe something will come, some  
shining coil of wind,  
or a few leaves from any old tree –  
they are all in this too.

And now I will tell you the truth.  
Everything in the world  
comes.

At least, closer.

And, cordially.

Like the nibbling, tinsel-eyed fish; the unlooping snake.

Like goldfinches, little dolls of gold  
fluttering around the corner of the sky

of God, the blue air.

## **“I’M GLAD YOU ASKED THAT QUESTION...”**

### **Introduction**

Like last year, for this concluding Sunday of the regular church year, I’ve invited you to send me any questions you may have. Because of the number and complexity of the questions I’ve received, I won’t be able to get to quite all of them. So if I don’t get to yours, please feel free to speak to me privately about your question.

I’ve divided this year’s questions into four categories:

- 1) Theological and philosophical questions;
- 2) Questions related to the Unitarian Universalist way in religion;
- 3) Questions related to this congregation;
- 4) And, finally, personal questions.

### **Theological and Philosophical Questions**

QUESTION: One theological question I received was from a mother who passed on a question from her youngster, who she reported was under the age of ten. The youngster wanted to know:

“Who thought up the idea of God?”

RESPONSE: I’m going to assume this youngster is in his or her religious education class this morning, and thus respond to the parent.

And to the parent I would say: If you want to take this question at face value, you could wade through a number of books and theories on the history of the idea of God – or I should say the “ideas” of God – and try to respond to your child’s question from an historical perspective.

More interesting, however, for both you and your youngster might be to read recent studies of the brain in which researchers believe they may have identified the part of the brain where ideas of God are contained. If I remember correctly, it’s somewhere above the left ear, though how it would not be in the frontal lobe of the brain, I’m not sure, so don’t trust me on this.

But, anyway, when you find out what part of the brain is related to the idea of God, you could take your child's head in your hands and point to the part of the brain within its vault where researchers think the idea is located, teaching your child that, yes, the idea of God is related to humans and, in particular, to the human brain.

Now, of course, if you studied brain research more, you could perhaps also point to places on your child's head wherein ideas of stones and stars are located, and notions of gratitude and generosity, or concepts of unicorns and gnomes.

Thus, we get into the question of not just who thought up the idea of God, or what the history of the idea is, or where the idea is located in the brain, but what the idea of God is about, what type of language is being used, and what dimension of reality it relates to.

Dr. Pittman McGehee, a recent guest speaker at our Fellowship, humorously (but also seriously) remarked that just as Mark Twain once quipped that he wouldn't want to belong to any organization that would have him for a member, so he – Pittman McGehee – wouldn't want to believe in any God of which he could conceive.

In other words, for Dr. McGehee, the “idea of God” points to that which is at the limit of our ideas, or that which transcends our ideas, or that power of being that enables us to have any ideas whatsoever – as in the opening words of the Tao Te Ching:

The tao that can be told  
is not the eternal Tao,  
The name that can be named  
is not the eternal Name.

(Tao te Ching, An English Version, Stephen Mitchell)

But putting all of this aside, here's how I tried to deal with such questions with my children when they were young: I would take this quite seriously as a teaching moment in the following way: If my child asked, “Who thought up the idea of God?” I might say:

“You know, honey, there is not just one idea of God, but a number of ideas of God. And for as long as there have been human beings they have wondered about why anything is, and how everything came to be, and what is the nature of the power in everything that is. And now you, too, are asking these big questions. This is a great adventure of thought and feeling you are beginning. And so what do you think? Who do you think might have first thought about the idea of God? And what do you think that first idea of God was?”

What I wanted to do with my children with this approach was to throw such questions back to them, to open their questions up, to expand the horizons of their inquiry.

Typically, I found my children satisfied with this approach; I found that they already had many thoughts and responses to their own questions.

But, if perchance, my children persisted and wanted to know what I thought, I would resist – as with questions about Santa Claus – and find ways to sidestep their question. I would not want to give my current adult concept of God directly to a young child.

But if my child kept persisting, I would say, “Honey, I’ll tell you my idea of God when you’re older.”

And, later, when that older time arrived, I would share my opinions as an equal in the adventure of ideas with regard to these ultimate, perennial questions of life and being.

Indeed, I recall a painful but creative time for one my children, when as a teenager, it became apparent in our conversation that I held a much less personal concept of God than she did.

Thus, she entered a time of rich reflection with respect to her concept of God. Her engagement with “the idea of God” evolved to fit a new time in her life. For, as Dr. McGehee suggests, “God” is a word, an idea, that points beyond itself to that which the human mind can never capture. “It” is that which recedes from us as we approach “It,” or, as the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke writes:

I live my life in growing orbits  
which move out over the things of the world....

I am circling around God, around the ancient tower,  
and I have been circling for a thousand years,  
and I still don’t know if I am a falcon, or a storm,  
or an unfinished song.

(tr., Robert Bly, News of the Universe)

QUESTION: A second question is from a mother wondering how to approach the question of ethics with her teenager. This mother writes:

“Bruce, here’s my question: Many UU’s were brought up with a Christian, Jewish (or some other organized religious) ethic about treating people fairly, living by the 10 commandments, and the golden rule. Even if we may have rejected the theology behind these traditions we still live by, or attempt to live by, the ethical rules that are part of those traditions, many of which are reworded into the 7 principles.

“As the parent of a very questioning teen, I often have a hard time explaining why these ethical rules all make sense, especially in the short term....

“I keep falling back on honor, integrity, and the values I learned from my family and religion. However, in terms of pragmatism, I feel that my arguments are much less convincing. If ‘God doesn’t care’ and there is little chance of being ‘punished’ on Earth, why not just live more selfishly?”

“Thanks, and good luck!”

RESPONSE: Dear Teen Parent: As you suggest, this is a big question, and there are many books that explore the foundations of ethics and morality, but for my short answer to your question I’m going to suggest two things:

First, that you reflect for a time on your own religious philosophy, for I suspect you will find it has a deeper and richer basis for ethical principles than what you are referring to as “pragmatism.”

The heart of religion, as I conceive it, has to do with how we are related to a larger whole of things. Quite simply, we don’t exist by or for ourselves alone, and to think that we should live that way, or to try to live that way, is not satisfying. I think it brings its own kind of punishment.

I suspect you have connected to the Unitarian Universalist tradition at least partially because you seek to live out your connections to the larger reality of which you are a part. And so, first, I suggest that you reflect carefully about your own larger connections in life, and, in particular, how your way of living is grounded in your awareness of being part of a larger whole.

Then, secondly, since your child is now a teenager on the verge of adulthood, and apparently an inquisitive sort, I suggest that you be willing to share your religious philosophy with your teen almost as you would with an adult ...and to invite your teen to share his or her philosophy of life with you ... not standing above your teen or trying to convince your teen that you are right, but saying directly, “This is how I see life. And this is how I try to live my life. And this is why I try to live my life this way.”

This invites your teen into the process; it invites your teen to think first about who he or she is in the larger scheme of things.

Now, perhaps, your teen will decide (at least for the present): “I belong only to myself and I will live my life only for myself.” That is not something that you can control, nor can you argue your teen out of such an approach and into an approach that is more acceptable to you. Such argument tends to have the opposite effect, for, as has been said, “We humans would rather fail on our own terms than succeed on someone else’s terms.”

So what I suggest is that you try to become clearer on your own basis for action, and then that you be willing to share and explore that with your teen – and inviting your teen to do the same with you. That attitude, it seems to me, will be felt by your teen and give him or her something solid to reflect upon, to push against, and to respond to.

**Questions related to the Unitarian Universalist way in religion**

QUESTION: I have three questions related to the Unitarian Universalist way in religion, one of them being:

“Why do many people enjoy beginning an argument about whether Unitarianism is a religion or a philosophy?”

RESPONSE: Well, I can't say I've personally heard this kind of argument much, and I don't know if the question is referring to persons within or without the Unitarian scene. So, rather than guess, let me give a definition of “religion” and “philosophy” by philosopher of religion Frederick Ferre that both distinguishes and connects the two approaches. Ferre defined religion as “one's way of *valuing* most comprehensively and intensively” and philosophy as “one's way of *thinking* most comprehensively and critically.”

(Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion, p. 69)

One of the things I like about our approach in religion is that we try to bring together valuing and thinking. And, personally, I often combine the two terms, thus, speaking of my “religious philosophy.”

QUESTION: Here's another question on the nature of the Unitarian Universalist way of religion:

“Bruce, I'm a brand new member, so I'm sure the answer to this would come with time and RE [religious education]. I have a few fundamentalist/evangelical Christian relatives. I'm sure that they think that UU is not a valid religion because it is not Christ- and God the Father-centered. (Although I personally am comfortable with the Judeo Christian underpinning on UU, I am excited about the many other traditions that are brought to bear.) What is the best way to explain UU to them, in a concise, understandable, thoughtful way, should they ask?”

RESPONSE: Dear New Member: The thing that is probably most difficult for persons of orthodox religious traditions to understand and appreciate about our way of religion is that our religious communities and societies emphasize process and principles that put the responsibility for particular theological content and belief onto the individual, rather than this being the province and responsibility of the religious institution.

In most Western religion, it is assumed that religion is largely about having proper doctrine and belief that the institution codifies and maintains, so that, as you suggest, the first question from a person of orthodox tradition is often, “What does your religion believe?”

And right here those of us with a religiously liberal approach are often stymied because we don't have a tidy box of institutional belief we can hand off to others. Thus, often we come off to those who do have a such a set doctrine as either having no beliefs at all or having whatever wacky beliefs might currently be floating in the stratosphere – say above San Francisco.

So here are a couple of things that could be said about our way in religion. First, as I say in our new member services:

Our approach in religion is based not on a common creed, but rather on a common process, a common quest, and a common goal of seeking and developing the highest, the deepest, and the best in each individual and in all persons together.

Secondly, one might add:

In religious liberalism, of which Unitarian Universalist congregations are a part, it's not a matter of just believing whatever you want but, rather, it's a matter of having the freedom and the privilege in the context of a supportive community to think through in a deep way what you do believe, and to consider what is appropriate to believe given the best of modern thought. Our religious communities are intended to provide an opportunity for individuals to examine and test their beliefs, to see in some cases what must be believed, whether or not it is pleasant, and to see in other cases whether a belief needs to be believed or is worthy of being believed.

These are a couple of possible responses on how to explain our approach in religion to others. But I think the main thing in relating the Unitarian Universalist approach to orthodox religion is to realize that it's not just a matter of having a couple of beliefs that might differ; rather, it's a whole different approach to the matter of institutional doctrine and belief.

And if this essential difference in approach has really been grasped, it may not be an easy conversation. Indeed, given the assumptions in much orthodox religion, there are good reasons for not regarding Unitarian Universalism as a religion.

QUESTION: This leads nicely into another related question in which the questioner asks:

“Is Unitarian Universalism accessible to people who aren't very smart? The intellectual rigor of your sermons and the absence of a doctrine seem to require an active mind. Are there populations the fellowship can't or don't attract, and do you care?”

RESPONSE: Well, I don't think you have to be “smart” to be part of our congregations – or, I should say, I hope “smartness” is not a prerequisite for being a Unitarian Universalist. Religion, to my mind, should not be about intellectual ability and, indeed, there are persons of keen intelligence in most every religious tradition.

At the same time, the intellectual element has always been important in our religious tradition. In our tradition, the life of the mind is an important part of the life of the spirit, and, indeed, you tend to find Unitarian Universalist congregations in places where there are universities.

Still, I don't think of our religion as being about "smartness," but, as in my answer to the previous question, about being interested in a way in religion that is related to principles, process, and ongoing exploration and revelation in contrast to fixed and final answers and revelations. This approach in religion will appeal to some and not to others.

So do I care about those populations that may not be attracted to our way in religion?

I recognize that there are persons whose needs other religious traditions and approaches will meet more readily than we do. But, on the other hand, I would certainly never want to arbitrarily limit our appeal or write others off.

Further, I believe there are many, who, if they knew about our approach, would find it not only helpful and sustaining, but even life-and-spirit-saving.

So I seek to find ways to more positively express our approach in religion, particularly to those who already share our basic ethos and approach to life, but who have no religious community for sharing, deepening, or celebrating that approach.

### **Questions related to this Congregation**

QUESTION: Now some questions relating more to this particular congregation:

"Bruce: This question might be too complex for your June service, but I thought I'd throw it out anyway. How does one person (one of 250 QUUF members) balance his or her personal desires with those of the congregation? There have been times when:

- a. I have over-emphasized my own agenda (and wished I hadn't been so self-absorbed);
- b. I have kept quiet (and wished I had expressed my opinion);
- c. Others' agendas seem to be squashing the desires of some who keep quiet;
- d. Others have kept quiet until after a decision has been made (and then been vocally upset with the outcome).

I see this 'living in community' issue as a religious one, but I struggle with it. Any comments on group process, respecting others while still maintaining personal integrity, balancing the self with the group?"

RESPONSE: Dear Questioner: As you suggest, this is a complex question deserving of more time than I have today, but for now let me simply say that the conflict and tension you experience between self and community is one I hope you never fully resolve ... for, to my mind, it is the willingness to feel the pull of the competing forces and the willingness to maintain their tension that indicates health, for yourself, in this case, but also for the community that is willing to do the same.

In this regard, I might suggest a favorite book of mine by author Robert A. Johnson, the author whose books were the basis of my spring sermon series. The little book is titled, Owning Your Own Shadow. In it, Johnson uses the analogy of a teeter-totter, suggesting

that the holy place in life, the place of wholeness, is not at either end of the teeter-totter but, rather, at the center, the fulcrum point. In other words, wholeness, holiness, health – all have the same etymological root – are found at the center of the polar opposites (such as self and others). Should that tension be broken and all the weight shift to one end or the other of the teeter-totter, there would be no movement, no life, no adventure.

And, as to group process, the suggestion I have is, to the extent possible, to continue to promote an atmosphere in which a generous space is provided in which people are encouraged to speak their truth while others are asked to respectfully listen. This is what happens in our Board meetings and at committee meetings when a moderator will say, “Let’s go around the circle and hear what each of you is thinking on this subject.”

It’s also the kind of thing that is core to the process of our Covenant groups. Remarkable things happen when people are encouraged to speak as clearly, truthfully, and lovingly as possible and to listen as quietly, carefully, and respectfully as they can.

QUESTION: Here’s a question many of you might not expect:

“I’ve been thinking about sending you a question, but I don’t know how to phrase it delicately enough, something about why do we continue our membership in the UUA – given that asking the question implies a desire to end that relationship. Every year we pay the UUA \$54 per member and the PNWD \$20, amounting to a total of about \$17,000 per year. What are the advantages of being affiliated? The disadvantages?”

RESPONSE: Having been a minister for twenty-two years with a completely independent and unaffiliated religiously liberal congregation and now for six years with three congregations who are member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, I do have a basis for comparison and some thoughts and opinions on this subject.

Mostly I see advantages, particularly for smaller congregations such as ours, in being affiliation with other congregations and having a central organizational office. Some advantages, to my mind, include:

- providing a variety of resources for the individual congregations, such as in music and education;
- providing training for clergy, religious educators, musicians, and others, as well as providing assistance in identifying and hiring such persons for the congregations;
- providing opportunities for sharing of ideas for both professional leaders and lay members at both district and national levels;
- providing opportunities to join together to engage in social justice work at national and international levels;
- providing opportunities for sharing and networking between congregations;
- providing counsel and assistance to congregations in times of distress, whether that be physical, organizational, or spiritual.

- Being part of an association of congregations is also helpful for persons who are moving to a new city or town. Because of the association of congregations, they often are able to find a community already in place that they can easily be a part of. Many members of our congregation, for example, were previously members of other Unitarian Universalist congregations.
- Further, without affiliation with other congregations, a congregation can tend to become isolated and insular, or prideful, thinking they are unique, when they are not at all. And they can make mistakes that they might otherwise not make if they were connected with other congregations and had other models.

The disadvantages and possible dangers of an affiliation are, to my mind, the following:

- The financial cost, as the questioner mentions, is probably the biggest disadvantage. Our treasurer tells me that this coming year we anticipate providing our national and district centers with \$18,056. That buys a fair amount of bread.
- Also, though affiliation can assist with new ideas and creative possibilities, it can sometimes also stifle the creativity of a congregation in that you may come to “take things off the shelf,” so to speak, rather than to dig a bit deeper into yourself.
- Also, sometimes in an Association there’s a pressure to do certain things in a certain way, or to overlook your own wisdom for that of the “outside expert;”
- Or, to take on certain issues that aren’t really pertinent to your congregation’s situation, to get pulled out of your own community and to import issues and problems from other places into your place;
- And, finally, with an Association there can also be bureaucratic aspects that an unaffiliated congregation wouldn’t have.

However, other than the financial liability, which is not insignificant, the disadvantages of being affiliated can be overcome, I believe, by staying attentive and thoughtful.

QUESTION: And here’s another question related to this congregation:

“If you were asked to choose 4 adjectives to describe our Fellowship, what would you choose and why?”

RESPONSE: If I were to be asked to describe this congregation in a general way to a person unfamiliar with it, I might use the following four descriptors:

- community minded
- environmentally concerned
- politically liberal
- artistically inclined

I would also want to add: economically diverse, self-starting, energetic, generally friendly and welcoming, and mature both in average age and as a religious community.

Why do I select these adjectives? Because that's what I've found here – all in all, a pretty positive picture. One should be so lucky to be part of such a community.

QUESTION: Here's a straight-forward question:

“Why is it that the guest speaker does not sit on the platform with you? There is room for two chairs up there. It appears to be a lower status designation to sit with the audience. All of the UU churches I have attended have had the guest speaker sit on the platform with the minister or moderator.”

RESPONSE: Well, I always discuss with the guest speakers where they would like to sit during the service, and invariably they prefer to sit with the congregation.

I think this common choice is probably due mostly to the size of our current sanctuary and the sense of informality it promotes.

Also, sitting with the congregation allows the speakers to get a better sense of the service and to be more relaxed, rather than perhaps to feel they are being scrutinized sitting so close the rest of the congregation if they were up front.

For example, two weeks ago our guest speaker on Memorial Day Sunday, poet Dan Gerber, was so emotionally moved by our service that at both services he had to compose himself before delivering the sermon. I suspect that if he had been sitting up front, he might not have been able to connect so feelingly with the service and the congregation.

This questioner might also note that I generally change places with the guest speaker during the sermon portion of the service, which is certainly more enjoyable and engaging for me than to be looking at the speaker's backside.

My guess, however, is that with the larger chancel area and sanctuary size anticipated in the new sanctuary, this seating arrangement might change so that, as is typical, the guest speakers will be seated on the chancel, which, indeed, has been my practice in the ministry prior to coming here.

### **Personal Questions**

QUESTION: And now to conclude with some personal questions, beginning with:

“Could you tell us about your typical week -- How many work hours, meetings, hospital or home visits, preparation time for a sermon, other weekly jobs? And, after a long week, which flavor of ice cream do you like best?”

RESPONSE: Well, there's not really a typical work-week, except that Sunday comes round every seven days, which provides a trajectory, a rhythm, and a certain anxiety to my life. But what happens within a given week can vary enormously, and usually I wish there were more hours than there are to do the various jobs that this question mentions. The sense of not being caught up is palpably present with me most of the time.

I might also say of my work habits that I do most of my work at my home, often very early in the morning – some of you who get my emails are aware of this. I'm also a person able to nap at the drop of a hat and will try to find one or more 5, 10, 15 or 30-minute spots during a day to regain both my energy and balance.

As to ice cream at the end of a long week: I just got a bad cholesterol report on my blood test, and so ice cream is out for a while.

QUESTION: Here's another:

“Thanks for inviting our question. Here's mine. One thing that happens during Sunday services is the minister takes on the role of spiritual leader and may serve as a conduit for my own spiritual energy. To put it in a Jungian way, the minister constellates an archetype. The congregant projects on to the minister that longing for the ineffable. For me, some ministers (including you, thank you very much) somehow mysteriously make it possible for my spiritual side to gather force inside me. Some people can do this for me and some people cannot – I'm not sure why, but I know it as soon as the person is in the chancel.

“Knowing that you've been through a Jungian analysis, I'm guessing that you're aware of this role that you play. The role must be, I would imagine, tremendously satisfying but also has the potential to be inflating and also has a possibility of leading to abuse. There is great potential good and also potential danger, both for you and for us. How do you relate to this role? How do you manage the pitfalls, and how has it changed you? Easy enough question – right?”

RESPONSE: I am aware of playing a role, and it's a role I have valued and think is valuable. At the same time, the role for me is not a distant one because at the same time that I'm attempting to constellate this kind of “spiritual space” for others, I'm also doing the same thing for myself. That is, I am also involved in the spiritual search and process, both in the preparation for the services and in the services themselves.

So, oddly enough, the Sunday service is also a service in which I find I can also participate, even though obviously I have to attend to aspects that others don't. Perhaps it's like the pilot of a passenger plane who has to attend to the matter of piloting the plane, but may also take pleasure in the view at the same time.

As to dangers of abuse, overstepping boundaries, inflation: I don't really know what to say except that one must always try to be on guard, or, in Jungian terms, as you suggest, not identify one's person with the role or archetype.

One aid to reducing inflation is the awareness that on any given Sunday while one person may be toasting you at the lunch following a service another may as easily be roasting you. That, too, goes with the role.

QUESTION: Here's another personal question:

“Hello Minister and Poet and friend, your and Flossie's work and social life are so closely related – how do you two separate them and get a deep breath without leaving the territory (especially with all the funding drives going on needing your presence)?”

RESPONSE: This is a good follow-up question to the one to which I just responded.

Ministers and their spouses or partners will deal with the relation between work and church social life differently, but for Flossie and me we have never sharply distinguished our work and our social lives. With each congregation that we have been with we have joined the community. I think I can safely speak for both of us in saying that this has seemed both natural and enjoyable for us.

As to getting a deep breath: I would say that to a large measure it is in the community that we do breathe. A significant part of our life-breath comes from being connected and involved in a religious community like this. Thus, the community uplifts more than it draws down our energy.

At the same time, of course, there are times when it is necessary and valuable to get away. And I look forward to getting away at times. And I do get away, both physically and mentally. I seem to have the capacity to get far away mentally, so far away, in fact, that when I return I will sometimes go over the Fellowship Directory to re-orient myself.

QUESTION: Here's another question in the personal category:

“What part of your job do you enjoy the most? And the least?”

RESPONSE: The part I enjoy the most is the preparation for and facilitating of poetry classes. The part I enjoy the least, since we are at that time of the year, is writing Annual Reports.

QUESTION: Another personal question:

“To take you up on your request for questions, I pose the following, very simply: How is it going for you and Flossie now that you've been with us a while? And: What else can we, the QUUF community, do to enhance your professional and personal experiences here?”

RESPONSE: You ask a simple question, I will reply simply. We like it here – a lot. And: no need to do anything more than you’re doing.

QUESTION: Final question, a multiple-part one:

“Hi Bruce, What answers would you give to the 10 questions that James Lipton asks his guests at the conclusion of each program of Inside the Actors Studio?”

1. *What is your favorite word?* A word I like, not for its meaning but for the way it rolls off the tongue, is “pusillanimous,” a word I borrowed from my father, who probably first heard it during the Vietnam era when Spiro Agnew referred to war protestors as “pusillanimous punks” and “nattering nabobs of negativity.”
2. *What is your least favorite word?* My least favorite word is “like” – as in, “Like, I think I’ll go to a movie tonight.”
3. *What turns you on?* Not this question. But if the question is asking, “What interests me?” – at this time of the year, it is seeing the daily growth of my vegetable and flower gardens.
4. *What turns you off?* Questions like this.
5. *What is your favorite curse word?* I’m not sure, but we could probably figure it out together if we went golfing sometime.
6. *What sound or noise do you love?* Rain falling on the broad leaves of trees in a tropical forest – such as on the island of Guam where I lived for three years.
7. *What sound or noise do you hate?* The sound of the brakes on the taxi-cabs in London. Awful, squeaky sound.
8. *What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?* I’ll give you three: airplane pilot, train engineer, brain researcher.
9. *What profession would you not like to attempt?* I’ll give you three again: dentist, eye surgeon, proctologist.
10. *If Heaven exists, what would you like to hear God say when you arrive at the Pearly Gates?* “Surprise!”

## **Conclusion**

That’s enough and too much for today. If this has sparked more questions for you, either save them for next year, or contact me personally.

## **Benediction**

And now may the faith we nourish here  
And the memories we gather here  
Give us hope for the future.  
May the love that we share  
And the companionship we feel  
Strengthen us and bring joy to our hearts.  
And may the blessings of our fellowship rest upon us,  
This day and forevermore. Amen.

### **Extinguishing of Chalice**

We extinguish this chalice  
But not the light of truth,  
The warmth of community,  
Or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts  
Until we are together again.

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of the services conducted by The Reverend Bruce A. Bode at the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on Sunday, June 10, 2007. The spoken services, available on audio cassette at the Fellowship, may differ somewhat in phrasing and detail from this manuscript version.)