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Minister Musings by Lee Richards

It's a new year, and one that promises to be exciting – right from starting with a "sexy" January and continuing on through to another Christmas holiday season at the end. In between – look for some "extra-curricular activities" that are being discussed, such as an alternative craft fair this spring, the Strawberry Festival, more nature-centered ceremonies, a steampunk con in the fall, and maybe some concerts, too. All this added to the regular services, movies, book discussions and pot-lucks – I think you'll find lots of ways to be engaged with your church. (And if you have ideas to offer for things to do let us know!)

By now it is likely you have heard we did not win the large New York State grant that would have helped restore our roof. However, if you read my column last month then you also know the board of trustees is already at work on finding other sources of funding. Losing the big grant only means losing some time – delaying the repairs until the monies can be found – it does not mean that the project won't be accomplished. We have a grand building, and we will preserve it.

Raising money and building projects probably aren't very sexy things to think about for most folks. That's why this January we're heating things up around here by looking at how sex influences our lives. The book discussion group is inviting you to read something about sex that has affected how you live your life. The minister movie will explore one couple's life of togetherness that was impacted by their sexuality, and I'll be offering a sermon on sex and spirituality. Church as an aphrodisiac? Well maybe not for most, but if I can't get your juices flowing then maybe I can at least stimulate your brain with something to think about!

See you at church!

Service Schedule – Sunday at 11:00AM

<u>Date</u>	<u>Minister</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Jan. 1	Dwain Wilder	Fireside Service
Jan. 8	Susan Daiss	
Jan. 15	Lee Richards	"The Quest for Truth"
Jan. 22	Lee Richards	"Sex and Spirituality"
Jan. 29	Ryan Acuff	"Taking Back the Land with Love"
Feb. 5	Rev. Ron Reidell	

Sunday, Jan. 1 – Annual Fireside Service @ 11:00 am, with Rochester poet Dwain Wilder. UUSC Guest at Your Table donations will be collected.

Monday, Jan. 2 – Pot-Luck Supper at 6:30 pm. Each month on the first Monday we get together to share our bounty. Everyone invited – you need not be a member of the church to join in on the good food and stimulating conversation.

Sunday, Jan. 8 – Worship Service @ 11 am, with Susan Daiss. UUSC Guest at Your Table donations will be collected.

Sunday, Jan. 15 – Board of Trustees meets @ 9:15 am.

Sunday, Jan. 15 – "The Quest for Truth" @ 11 am. Speaking about the UU church, covenant #471 in the hymnal states "...The quest of truth is its sacrament..." We'll look at the history behind that statement and explore its relevance for us today. Presented by Lee Richards. UUSC Guest at Your Table donations will be collected.

Wednesday, Jan. 18 – Movie with the Minister @ 7 pm. "Edie & Thea: A Very Long Engagement" may be short at only 61 minutes but it is long on issues, including love, sexuality, gay rights and marriage equality, disability, and death and dying. This film is about Life and Love – both with a capital "L" – and deserves our consideration.

Sunday, Jan. 22 – "Sex and Spirituality" @ 11 am. Our book discussion group's assignment for this month is about sex, so how about a sermon on the same topic? Humans are both very sexual, and very spiritual, beings. Lee Richards will consider how these two aspects of our nature interweave with each other. UUSC Guest at Your Table donations will be collected.

Sunday, Jan. 29 – "Taking Back the Land with Love" @ 11 am, with Ryan Acuff. The phrase "love your neighbor" takes on new meaning when your neighbor is being foreclosed and evicted, sometimes illegally. Come learn what a group of compassionate "neighbors" are doing to help right the wrongs. LAST DAY TO RETURN your UUSC Guest at Your Table donation.

Sunday, Jan. 29 – Book Discussion group meets after coffee hour (about 12:30 pm). We will heat up this chilly month with the topic of "Sex." Choose a book to read on the topic of sex and then share with us how it impacted your spiritual life. Our approach to book discussions this year – rather than everyone reading the same book we invite you to consider a monthly topic as a guideline in selecting your tome. Each month will have a different theme/topic. In this way we can each bring a different viewpoint we've read about to the discussion. Future topics (not in order) may include Charity, Love, Politics, Earth, Fire, Wind, Water.

Pastoral Care

One of the advantages of having a called minister is the 24/7 availability of a listening ear. Pastor Lee Richards is 100% committed to helping parishioners when stuff hits the fan. You are encouraged to call Lee and share what's going on, or pull him aside during coffee hour. Lee wants to know about the difficulties people are facing. Sometimes just talking about your troubles with a minister will help with finding a solution.

Lee can be reached at 585-436-1786, or on his cell at 585-729-8167. He also has a toll-free number: 877-265-1709. Lee is also available for home and hospital visits, or can meet with people in the pastor's office at the church.

Phone Tree

It's winter, and there is always a possibility that weather conditions may force a cancellation of a worship service or other church event. There is a phone tree for contacting people to inform everyone if a cancellation occurs. Of course, to work well we really need to be sure we have the latest contact information for you. Please take a moment to check how you are listed in the membership directory, or send your info to Chris Loss (closs@rochester.rr.com) or Lee Richards (pastor.lee.richards@gmail.com) so we can keep the tree accurate and current.

Guest at Your Table

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is a nonsectarian organization that advances human rights and social justice in the United States and around the world. We envision a world free from oppression and injustice, where all can realize their full human rights. Guest at Your Table is an annual tradition in which congregation members take home a box featuring people that UUSC has worked with recently. These people are your "[guests](#)," and you are asked to share your blessings with them. The funds raised through this program support our human-rights work in the United States and around the world! You may turn in your contributions any Sunday during January.

JOYS & SORROWS

•**Rev. Don Reidell** – thanked the congregation on 12/4 for the floral arrangement that was sent and for the many well-wishes that he received following minor surgery recently. He recovered very well! And by the way, he also celebrated a birthday on this day!!

•**Diana Dudley** – reported that her son, Eric, who lives in San Diego has been working for awhile on a welding unit that goes on space ships, and that if his unit had been used, he believes the 'Challenger' would not have blown up in space so many years back. NASA has purchased this unit and it will be going into space on a vessel designed to record activity on Mars. What an amazing accomplishment!!

•**Jim Knight** – was in Batavia recently at GCC for a concert and heard an old Beatles melody that moved him to tears. Ask him which one it was!!

•**Sarah Diemer** – said that out in the wider world, things often go wrong but then she comes to this church and inevitably something happens that allows her to carry on. Thanks Sarah!!

PULLMAN PLAUDITS

•**Sarah Diemer, Jennifer Diemer, and Pastor Lee Richards** – for the wonderful and very successful Solstice celebration on 12/21! What a treat! And several guests came. The impromptu drumming afterwards in the coffee hour room was a lot of fun, too!

•**C.W. Lattin, Sarah Diemer and Jennifer Diemer** – for decorating the church so beautifully for the holidays! It just couldn't be more lovely! And Sarah and Jennifer also donated

a gorgeous Christmas tree that was in the sanctuary by the piano. Many thanks!

•**Andrea Rebeck** – her work on the wonderful grant that she submitted was more than amazing, and it can be used again in the future if we so choose! We didn't get the grant, but as everyone knows, you just never know what will happen with grants. As it happened, a big award was granted to a commercial endeavor in Albion. Most of the awards went to commercial ventures. Again, a big thanks to Andrea for all her incredible efforts!

•**Jim Knight** – for agreeing to deliver Christmas cheer to our shut-ins! Some received fruit baskets, and some received Poinsettia plants. He did a great job! Thanks Jim!

•**Diana Dudley** – who continues to head up the Occupy Albion group, and they appeared again in the local paper recently!

•**Pastor Lee Richards** – has been very busy this holiday season with all of our various activities. He made sure that the church was open on Christmas day, and was here for the Solstice and the Annual Candlelight services.

•**Dick Hoffman and Diana Dudley** – have been coming in and doing needed work at the church recently, and Diana obtained a book that will be used when anyone comes in to do work at the church, so we can keep track of what is being done and who is doing the work. If you happen to come in some day and repair something or do some cleaning (etc.) make sure you record this effort in the book. This book will help us with future grant writing, because it is reflected as 'in-kind' service.

***Dick Hoffman** has repaired about nine or more basement windows, and has hauled in some bricks, and has been busy preparing the church for winter. This is work that needed to be done and we are very grateful for all of his efforts!

Winter Solstice Service

Member Sarah Diemer graciously constructed and offered our solstice service on 12/21. We had requests to see her words in print and so, with her permission, here they are. Enjoy...

The Sun Ceremony

Once, long ago, when the world was new, the ancestors cherished the sun. It was because of our bright star that the plants grew, and the world was warmed and life was beautiful and bountiful. But, as the winter months drew near, the bright star shone in the sky less and less. The nights grew longer until our ancestors came to the longest night of the year. Darkness was absolute – why, it seemed that even the far distant stars shone less brightly in the velvet black of that night sky. Our ancestors gathered together in silence, afraid. This was the longest night that had ever been – there were no guarantees in the ancient world. What if the sun had died? What if she would never return?

"We must call it back," the people whispered to one another. "We must give a great shout, so that the sun hears us, so that the sun will return." So that's what they did. On all of the snowy hills, they lit great, burning fires that shone in the darkest night. They gathered together, and they sang and danced and made merry all through that longest night.

And, in the morning, the sun came back.

Now, we know that the earth revolves about the sun. We know that, tomorrow morning, the sun will rise, because it has always risen. But what if it didn't? Nothing in life is sure. Though our ancestors knew very little of science or how our world works, they knew enough to never take anything for granted. They knew that celebration, sharing, gathering together in love when there was absolutely no reason to, probably every reason not to, was a declaration of faith to the universe. They knew that celebrating light on the darkest night of the year was a physical prayer to the sun, a reminder to her to please return.

So the star returned. You know, sometimes, I forget the sun is a star. It's not obvious, if you think about it. It gives us day, an alien landscape when compared with night, when you see the stars twinkling overhead, warm and soft in the chilly glow of a December evening. When the sun stays with us such a short time during the day, we are lulled by the night, made sleepy by the darkness, thinking on soft, contemplative things, veritable bears in our caves, ready for that long winter's nap. I go to bed so much earlier in the winter, hardly see the sun because I work all day...if I didn't pay attention, if I became unaware of daily moments, I would forget it existed entirely. It might be that way with a lot of us. We have day jobs, we're busy, we have Too Much To Do, and the sun slips away from us sooner and sooner, until it's just a deep orange memory along the horizon. The night can make us forget that there was ever once light--but now is the strongest time to remember that we are still following a star. It's distant, it's hard to catch a glimpse of, the gold, elusive thing, but it's still there.

Your star is always there, though sometimes the dark is so deep, we can't see it. But you only need a little light, and then darkness is not so absolute.

Our ancestors celebrated the return of the light by kindling that light in themselves and each other. They exchanged gifts, they fostered relationships, love, friendships and kindness. They upheld one another in a dark time, and they upheld themselves with a very clear and absolute courage. We possess that same courage to follow our own stars, to cherish and support our own light and the light of each other. "Strike one match in the dark, all the world's not the same."

And light answers to light.

So let us remember the warmth of the sun. I invite you to make yourself comfortable, however that is best possible for you. Relax, breathe, rest. Here, now, please receive a little stone. A pebble. A little bit of earth. Everything has energy, we all have energy, and the idea of our star has energy. The stone you've chosen for yourself, in the dark, is the physical manifestation of the spark of your star. Here, in the dark, hold your stone, think about your star.

Think of the sun, think on the great pull of its grace and fire. Feel the gravity of this star within you, all around you, holding you close enough to receive everything you need, but far enough away to never feel burned. You are the embodiment of the warmth of this light, and it fills every bit of you, from top to toe.

We follow the star, our star, throughout our lives, the deep passions that fulfill us, the sensation of being connected to something so much greater than ourselves. All of this knowledge, all of this courage, all of this fire and light is within us at all times. Our ancestors knew how interconnected we were with the sun, and we feel that now. And we know that the sun, the star, lies within us.

Our physical bodies are made up of the same things as stars. Within our blood and body and bones is stardust, is the seeds of planets, is the pulsing heart that once was part of a sun. We are, physically, connected to the larger universe, places and times and things we cannot even comprehend. Our spirits, too, are hinged to this greater existence. All of this is within us, and yet we are so very small.

The stones in our hands are now warm from our warmth. Even smaller than us, these are but tiny seeds of possibility.

Now, please close your eyes. Hold the stone in your hand, feel its warmth and weight, so small, and yet, still it sits there, waiting. Think on your greater passions, your dreams...the stars you follow. In your life you have followed so many stars. The stars that led you here, now, to this moment, your dreams and passions that brought you to this place. Here, we stand on the edge of a bright new year with so many stars gone behind you. So many beautiful lights you have held in your heart...all of the light you have given this world thus far.

Now, I invite you to think about this coming year...the beautiful possibility that lays before you. Every day after this one, the nights grow shorter, the days grow longer, the sun and light and life returns. What star will you follow this year? What star will you celebrate? What will you give your light to? For you have so much light. Within you is the dust of stars, of planets, a million, million light years of being. And, in your palm, the seed of possibility waits.

When you are ready, please open your eyes.

The stone sits in your hand, warm with your intentions, your plans, your dreams. Keep it with you. When you see it, think on light, think on possibility. Remember your star and celebrate it on this longest night – and always.

Blessed be!

"Help Us Help You"

PMUC's campaign to purchase an AED (portable defibrillator) continues. We've received about \$500 but we still need your help to reach our \$1350 goal. You can donate on our website <http://pullmanmemorial.org/> using PayPal or any major credit card and it will be earmarked for the AED. Or you can donate by check or cash - just be sure to notate "AED" so we'll know to add it to the special fund.

So Help Us Help You - after all, you never know what "heart-stopping" event may transpire when at church!

Eye on the Board of Trustees
from the meeting held on 12/18/11

Treasurer's Report – 1). Diana Dudley's name is in the process of being added to the HSBC bank account toward the eventual transfer of the position of treasurer from Dick Hoffman to Diana. 2). The check for our APF (Annual Program Fund) dues to the St. Lawrence District continues to be missing. 3). The semi-annual tuning of the pipe organ was paid for.

Ministerial Report – 1). Pastor Lee, Susan Daiss, and several church members attended a DAR ceremony where C.W. Lattin received a national recognition award. 2). Sarah and Jenn Diemer are collaborating with Pastor Lee to present a Winter Solstice service on Dec. 21 at 7 pm. The board of trustees wishes to acknowledge and thank them for this contribution to the church. 3). The UUSC “Guest at Your Table” donations are due back by the end of January, and may be returned at any service during January. 4). Dick Hoffman will follow through on getting an internet connection at the church.

Building and Grounds Report – 1). Discussed roof water leaks. No way to address them at this time. 2). The need for a railing at the front steps was raised. C.W. will get some cost estimates. 3). A log book was provided by Diana so volunteers can record their donations of time and/or materials (to be kept near the phone). 4). The heating cable for the roof eaves needs to be activated. 5). Because we do not have a custodian, volunteers are encouraged to keep up on general cleaning.

Grant Proposal – We were not awarded a grant from the Regional Economic Development Council for roof replacement.

NYSCU Loan Request – Chris Loss talked with Joyce Gilbert for advice about the application process. The board decided to pursue a loan of \$40,000 with a repayment period of 3 years.

Finance Committee – The board is requesting a transition plan be developed for transfer of the position of treasurer (the finance committee will remain responsible for investments).

P.O. Box – Motion approved to rent a Post Office box with 2 keys so incoming mail can be "centralized" and the risk of lost mail be minimized.

GUUSTO Report – No meeting since our last BoT meeting. Pastor Lee contacted the coordinator at First Universalist in Rochester and arranged for our donation of \$200 to be used for providing meals in support of the Occupy Rochester protesters. The donation was gratefully accepted.

Shut-Ins – Jim Knight volunteered to coordinate delivery of Christmas baskets or flowers to members unable to attend church.

Adopt-A-Highway Proposal – Tabled indefinitely until more interest is expressed.

Wayside Pulpit – C.W. will investigate a printer who could create posters for our display.

UUA Fair Share – Discussion raised about increasing our contribution from the current 50% to 100%. The church is assessed about \$75 for each active member. Historically we've paid based upon average Sunday worship attendance rather than the total number of members on our role. Pastor Lee suggested postponing the discussion until after the spring pledge drive for budget planning purposes.

NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 15, 2012 AT 9:15 AM.

You are right to be indignant. The fact is the system is not working right. It is not right that we have so many people without jobs when we have so many needs that we have to fulfill.

It's not right that we are throwing people out of their houses when we have so many homeless people.

Our financial markets have an important role to play. They're supposed to allocate capital, manage risks.

But they misallocated capital, and they created risk.

We are bearing the cost of their misdeeds.

There's a system where we've socialized losses and privatized gains. That's not capitalism;

that's not a market economy. That's a

distorted economy, and if we continue

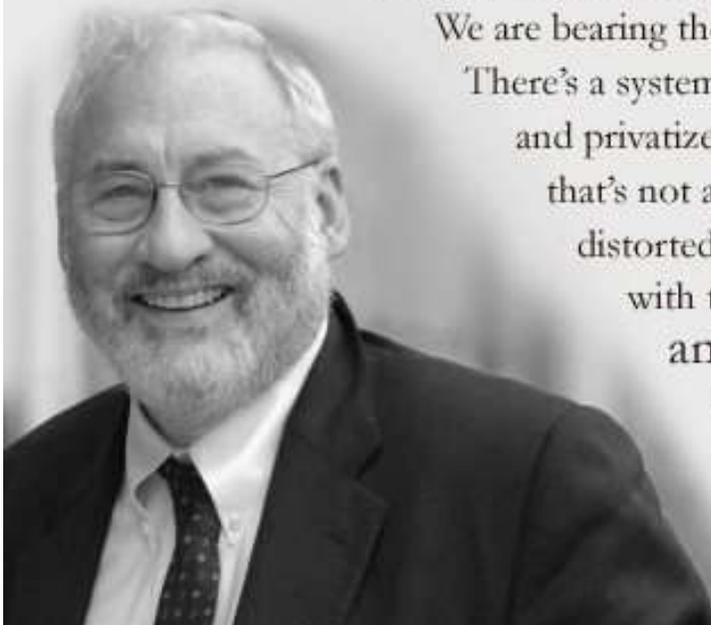
with that, we won't succeed in growing,

and we won't succeed in creating a just society.

-- Joseph Stiglitz,

Economist and Nobel Laureate,

speaking to protesters in Zuccotti Park



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