

**Chalice Lighting – Woody Chittick**  
**April 13, 2008**

Spring is finally here! A time of re-birth and new beginnings. Today is special because we get to welcome 5 new members to our growing congregation. And as we welcome them, I think it's appropriate for each of us to think about what first brought us here and what keeps us coming back – some for a half century or more – a remarkable testament:

- Linc & Iri Bloomfield                      53 years
- Dick Leggat                                      51
- Jackie & Dave Whipple                      49
- Roger Whitley                                  51
- Ed & Lucia Wood                              54
- Eleanor Bleakie                                 62

On the surface, your spiritual journeys probably were quite different from mine, but there seem to be some common threads:

- Most of us did not grow up UUs – this religion found us as much as we found it. And for those who grew up UU, spouses often came from a different religious tradition and choices had to be made. Becoming a UU was not automatic for any of us.
- I was a dutiful Episcopalian, in the boys' choir, an acolyte, and finally head of the Episcopalian student group at Dartmouth – 500 students strong. And yet, sometime along my path to adulthood, I had ceased believing in the Trinity, the virgin birth, and a remote God who could be accessed best via intermediaries. One Sunday when reciting the Nicene Creed, I had an epiphany – that the Episcopal Church and I were not cut out for each other – and I found myself “church-less.”
- For years, I didn't feel the need for a spiritual replacement – being decidedly “anti-dogma,” an afternoon in the garden was all the “religion” I needed. Perhaps some of you started with a “mixed” marriage (2 faiths) and needed a “neutral” religion, or perhaps you grew up with no religious tradition at all and deliberately set out to find a spiritual home.

**So where did you begin your spiritual journey?**

Your arrival at First Parish may have been thoughtful and deliberate, but I confess that a search for spiritual meaning wasn't the primary motivator in my early years here.

- JoAnne and I had begun a family and felt the need for some structured religious education – church was for our children more than for us.
- We church-shopped – finally, we discovered that we had a wide circle of friends who also attended First Parish, there was a lively , large and creative church school for our kids (thanks to Betsy Millard), plus some raucous circle dinners and Ed’s “challenging” sermons – that was enough to get us hooked.
- Before too long, the absence of dogma and emphasis on self-discovery began to feel strangely familiar – as though I was coming home rather than discovering a place I had never been to.

### **So what brought you here in the first place?**

And what keeps me coming back?

- Is it our friendships and community of interested and interesting people? Is it our wonderful Meeting House with its more than 250 years of history?
- Yes, but probably more than anything, it’s our 7 UU principles – even though on a quick read they seem a bit trite. I mean, who could object to building a peaceful, fair and free world, or to allowing everyone to speak out and vote on things that matter to them, or to taking care of the earth, and so forth? Taken literally, these could be parts of the platform of any of our political parties!
- Of course what transforms these 7 principles from feel-good statements to complex ethical & spiritual guidelines is that we are not only obliged to interpret these according to our experiences and intellect, but that we must live our lives accordingly. It’s why our congregations are such a rich mix of Republicans and Democrats, theists and atheists, Christians and Jews, Buddhists and humanists and other “ists” too numerous to mention here.

### **So what is it that holds you here?**

It seems to me that as different as our specific experiences may have been, we really have a lot in common – most of us began a spiritual journey without intending it, and arrived at First Parish by serendipity as much as by careful planning. And we’ve had to learn that being a Unitarian-Universalist takes effort.

So why do we remain in community? I think it’s because we don’t have all the answers – just the questions.