

President's Message, December, 2007

With the Christmas season now before us, I want send a message of holiday greetings to Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists around the world. However you choose to mark these days ahead, I join with the members of the ICUU Executive in wishing you happiness, peace and a renewal of the spirit.

In mid-December our Unitarian church in Edmonton Canada is holding a family service that features a pageant. This year we have written a story about two children who stumble on a most marvellous celebration taking place in the forest. They discover an enchanted world where all the animals come together to mark the festivals of light celebrated in many places in the world. One group of animals tend the ancient Yule Log fire of northern Europe. Another animal wears Santa Lucia's crown of lights. Some small creatures tend the Jewish Hannukah candles or the lamps of India's Diwali. There are even birds drawing attention to the rising of the Pleiades in the sky. The Maoris of New Zealand note the first rising of this constellation in their winter sky to mark Te Tau Hou, their new year. That starts the Matariki festival. Of course in the southern part of the world that celebration of returning light comes near the solstice in June not December. And of course there is a Christmas tree and a kind of nativity scene as well.

When the children ask why the animals are marking the solstice night in this way, their guide, the wise old owl, explains, "We animals celebrate all of the festivals of light. Why? Well, who knows which festival is right? Maybe they are all right. We celebrate them all because they remind us that all the animals and all the humans around the world need the growing light in the cold and dark. We need the hope. We need to find ways to be joyful together."

In Edmonton, Canada, we only get about seven hours of daylight in this, our darkest part of our year. Perhaps that makes the holiday lights especially important to us. I go to work in the dark and come home in the dark. That can be a little hard on the spirit. I find that the twinkling coloured lights on houses and businesses can lift those spirits by reminding me that I am not alone. They remind me that my neighbours also crave the return of the light, the return of the spirit and the return of hope just as much as I do. The holiday stories from around the world all share some of the same messages, whether it's the Nativity story, the story of kindly Sinter Klaus or Saint Nicholas, or the transformation of the miser Ebenezer Scrooge

(written by Unitarian Charles Dickens). In the winter of the soul, we have to look deep into to ourselves and our relationship with the divine. And we must look those around us to help us find peace, joy and hope for the future.

May you find all of these things this holiday season.

In faith, Brian