

Affirmation

January 22, 2006

My name is Terry Frank. I have been a member of countryside church for almost 17 years and this is my first affirmation. My husband has done **two** and 2 of my children have done it. The last time Ruppert – our previous minister- asked me to do one - I told him about my fear of public speaking – he told me straight out that I was going to have to get over that one day. Well I haven't-- but my youngest child will be doing her affirmation in 2 years and I just don't want to be last.

I actually volunteered for this. I wanted people to know how Countryside has helped me formulate my personal theology over the years.

I am a Recovering Catholic-

When I first heard that term used years ago -I was offended- did people actually consider being Catholic to be some kind of disease. As it turns out I **have** had a very difficult time over the years recovering from my childhood teachings of a fear-based religion. I was taught to be good or expect the wrath of a punishing, vengeful God. This was not how I wanted to raise my children.

So as we were expecting our first child 18 years ago-my husband Larry began looking for a church. Larry was raised Lutheran and had his own discomforts there. We were talking about this to 2 of Larry's co-workers- who happen to be long time members of Countryside- duRee Bryant and Trudy Kleckner. I told them that I believed God was a loving and forgiving God – not a punishing God who would banish souls to a place of eternal flames and agony. I told them I didn't ever really understand the Trinity thing and I believed in one God for all people. I can't remember if it was Trudy or duRee but they said "You are both Unitarians- you just don't know it yet". We didn't know what Unitarian Universalism was and didn't know we had just defined it.

After taking the 4 part Intro classes and buying the Unitarian Home Reference binder- I decided the best way for me to learn more about the Unitarian religion was to volunteer as an religious education teacher and that's where I have been for the past 17 years – Which is probably why some people still ask me if I m new here. AND I **have** learned

many things from preparing for the classes I taught but I continued teaching to be reminded of how we put our Unitarian principles into action. This has not always been easy for me-- especially during challenging life situations.

In the past - I had often turned to prayer. As a Unitarian, my Our Fathers and Hail Marys from childhood didn't feel right any more and I realized I didn't know how Unitarians prayed. Around that time Rev Scott Giles --our community based minister coincidentally gave a sermon on "prayer without ceasing" And Trudy Kleckner one of our lay ministers taught me about meditation- I have used both types of prayer ever since . And they have got me through some pretty difficult times.

These difficult times seems to increase in number with advancing age. Life- changing things happen... like illness or death of family members and friends, personal health problems, relationship crises and of course- ...teenagers...they happen around middle-age too.

During my middle age- I have had to deal with resurfacing feelings of abandonment from an alcoholic mother and liver tumor surgery -- which I survived with Trudy's help. but the thing I had the most difficulty with was the death of my closest friend at the age of 45. After 2 years I can agree that out of suffering comes strength and for me knowledge.

After she died I read all I could about death and dying which lead me to keep reading all I could about spirituality- so far-- 2 have touched me deeply- One is "**The Seat of the Soul**" by Gary Zukav and the other which I found on the shelves of Atherton Hall --is called **Conversations with God-** by Neale Donald Walsch-

Not only did it speak to me personally but it triggered the need to talk with others spiritually- It has helped me put my beliefs into words. One of these beliefs is that "we are all one"- I am facilitating a covenant group to discuss this book and at the same time enjoy spiritual kinship.

During the past 9 months or so I have been involved in the kinship circle covenant group that Rev. Julie and Stephanie Matz have developed. It has been a wonderful spiritual experience and I have gotten to know more of the adults in our congregation. It has also indirectly helped me with grief issues related to my girlfriend's death.

I remember years ago when Walter Payton died, Mike Ditka said something like "what a shame for him to die so young- your forties are just when you start figuring out what life is really about" I can't agree with him more.

So I am trying to live in the present and pay more attention to what life is about. I am trying to increase my reverence for life's creating, sustaining, and transforming power by worshiping, continuing to read and study, and by providing service to others. For me, our covenant is not just about our church---- it's what life is about.