The Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society of Madison

Vol. 4, No. 7 NEWSLETTER December 1, 1971

Upcoming programs:

December 5 - FIRST SUNDAY AT PORTAL POSTER CENTER, 1806 West Lawn Ave.
New meeting time: 10:00 a.m.

"A Tribute to Mikis Theodorakis, composer of "Zorba the Greek"
by George Calden

December 12 - Christmas Service, by Dave Meyer

December 19 - Family Christmas program

December 26 - No meeting

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RIC MASTEN - FESTIVE OPENING

Ric Masten, poet and folksinger, will be with Prairie on Sunday, Dec. 5 at 7:30 p.m. to celebrate our move to West Lawn Ave. Plan to attend our festive opening! Ric will also perform at Union South on Saturday evening, and do the the Sunday Service at First Society. Following this service, First will have a luncheon for Ric; everyone is invited.

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OPEN HOUSE AND PARTY PLANNED

Dave and Pat Meyer will hold a Christmas Open House on Dec. 12 from 3 to 5:30 p.m. at 5804 Anthony Place in Monona. Please plan to come... for wassail and good cheer.

Ted and Rebecca Clark will host the annual Prairie Christmas party on Dec. 28 at 8 p.m. at 1134 Waban Hill. Look for more details in the next Newsletter.

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CHRISTMAS SPECIALS

Again this year we will be having a SYMBOL TREE for Christmas. For the services on Dec. 12 and 19 we encourage people to bring objects to decorate the tree. Anything you would like to place on the tree as a symbol, whether of Christmas or of some other thing which you like or appreciate, please bring on one of these two Sundays.

Let's celebrate NEW LIFE together! If you have a new child in your family, or one whose birth you have never formally commemorated, contact Dave. We hope to celebrate these new lives together at our Family Christmas program on Dec. 19.

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION NEWS

A very special thanks to the following persons who gave their time and energies to make the first trimester of the R.E. program a success: Rod French and Nancy McElreath who co-ordinated the nursery; Pat Cautley and Melinda Rosnoy who team taught the pre-school and 1st and 2nd grades; Clark Edwards who taught 3rd through 5th grades; Vivian Meyer who taught 6th grade; and John Humphstead who taught the junior high class. (Parents, please note: your 7th and 8th graders want Nikon movie cameras for Christmas!)

Prairie children collected about $25 for UNICEF. If anyone has money he has not turned in, please return to Pat Meyer as soon as possible.

Burt Swanson has volunteered to build a combination climbing toy-bookcase for the nursery... if someone will donate the plywood. He would like to do this during the Christmas holidays, so please call him soon at 250-6044.

Rachel and Bob Siegfried are grandparents. Margaret and Jeff Thomas of California are the new parents of nine-lb. Annie.
Three weeks ago I went to a conference of ministers gathered from throughout the midwest and southwest. Aside from the joy of fellowship this group every year chooses a theme on which half a dozen or so members are asked to do papers. This year the theme was "the place of the fool in contemporary religion," an idea drawn from the book A Feast of Fools by Harvey Cox. Though many of us found the topic of interest, the papers of value, no one seemed to think too highly of the book. The general assessment, with which I would wholeheartedly agree, was that Cox has written an interesting, extremely provocative and evocative book filled with irresponsible generalizations and blanket statements, some poor scholarship, gross oversimplifications, and some ethical statements which seem at best naive. Out of the papers and discussions at this conference flowed many interesting ideas; one which occurred to me I would like to share with you.

Until recent times one of the main personages present in any court or government, no matter how great or petty, was always the fool or jester. In some circumstances the fool was little more than the village idiot, dressed oddly and kept around for the amusement of the more fortunate. But often the fool was a comic wit with a peculiar license to satirize and even ridicule the policies and people of the court. His role was always a delicate one, for he had simultaneously to keep enough favor with those in power that he lost neither his position nor his head, while keeping them on their toes and helping them to maintain a sense of humility and humor about themselves and their actions. He was sometimes the sole repository of common sense in the midst of pomp and circumstance. If the fool was a really good fool, he could often voice the criticisms felt by others in the court, but voice them in a style and manner which made them palatable to the powerful. The antics, jests, and parodies which were the stock and trade of the fool might transform, in the hands of a master, into parables and into moments of sudden realization in which new levels of understanding and new alternatives of thought and action opened up for kings and counsellors. In a sense the court jester, assisted by laughter, might help the court to see its own finitude and accept its limitations, thus enabling people to go beyond themselves.

When the fool was brilliant enough to function in this fashion, he became a real political and ethical force in the public realm. However, in order to do this, he need not necessarily have alternative patterns of thought and action clearly worked out; he need not be a systematic political theorist or theologian. What he often did was play the devil's advocate, exposing the other side of a question, raising issues, flying beyond the limited perspectives of an argument or policy consideration to discover for everyone (including himself) new ways of responding. This, it seems to me, may be a particularly potent style either in politics or religion, where no one has certain answers and where we all need refreshing new approaches. We may, of course, discover that these new approaches are not new at all, but ancient and forgotten -- as the role of the fool is in the modern state. The important thing is that a fool among us may ask the questions or ridicule the assumptions or point up the implications of our thought and actions into which we are so thoroughly enmeshed that we have lost perspective on ourselves.

I think I must point out that in playing the fool, one runs great risks, for a society or a faith may rest too completely on some of its assumptions to survive an attack upon them. And when a fool leaps into the unknown in order to push us all beyond ourselves, he may open a Pandora's Box to torment us and tear us apart as easily as he opens new horizons for our visions and hopes. In this the fool, for me, is not separable from the mystic or the prophet. All three risk great error and incoherence, and risk moral irresponsibility and...
destructiveness, in the faith that we can do better and think better than a given situation reveals to us that we can. A mystic attempts to cut through the inadequacies of present language to get closer to a truth he feels but cannot articulate; a prophet attempts to speak for a course of action which he feels is better than the present course. Neither rest-assured in their position, but risk on the chance (faith) of improving things. And so does the fool among us (and perhaps within us all).

Dave Mayer

Since the Hallowe'en program Oct. 31, several people have asked Dave for a copy of the poem he wrote for the occasion. Here it is, plus another for raccoon-fans.

Self-portrait, Hallowe'en

Slow swirls of death bear over October, a harvest of chill breath. Prairie grasses' drip and sigh, bow tired heads, and fold their lives again into the earth. Beasts of prey (owls, foxes, you and I) stare blindered, hungry, damp as solitary moles trapped in mist-caves of autumn's ghost-air.

Magic tracks in this seasoned spook! Look. There. The face I dream at night but pray I never face at all appears, it shifts its form and fades, it drifts away and then dissolves into a small, fall-blushing-bush I know will haunt me after this with animistic fears.

Too many shapes confound in fog with nightmares and our spirits' unmade snarls.

I know my eyes are eager to mis-see, to shift the horrors of my heart from me into enchanted whirls and worlds.

But I cannot transform my eyes to wood; they find what they will find that thought and self-esteem hold hid; and a captive audience of sorcerers abiding deep in me who trick my heart to halt a beat, to flutter and fade out ---

There Satan's forehead floats in the hillside's wrinkled brow; a field of giant witches rests, their hats, like shocks of cornstalks, on their breasts;

and now I hear death rattle leaves and wind through fence-row weeds.

Surely the face I dreamed of mist is me someday, fallen like snow into the black, earthy mouth of sleep, melted and dissolved, growing up again in fields of prairie grass to haunt this misty air with a harvest of windblown songs.

Self-portrait as Raccoons

Waddling, forepaws pad soft earth and crease the mud with dainty claws. The raccoon muzzles dead stumps: Where hide those yummy grubs? Nose through leaves and mould to rob their graves. Sometimes (says faith) goodies wiggle for the famished soul. Root and sniff fallen limbs; the coon disturbs earth, discovers nothing. Others beat him to it.

Hof! Therel! Something there squiggles. Snort it up. . . . ugh. Bitter as sour bark.

There must be more than this.

And then, at last, the heavenly garbage heap! The coon, grabs crusts and foul lettuce, funny forepaws patting and pushing, almost a dancer in his joyful munch --- scatter the stale remnants; where the morsels of delight?

Just then, crusts discarded and the glorious garlic toast unsathered, ring-eyed and prisoner striped competition sides near with growl and snort; claws and teeth demand, his mouth a wrinkle of disdain. No muzzle here, no prod, no rooting soft and earthy. Only theft and heaven lost.

Dave Mayer
SUNDAY SERVICES now at the Portal Foster Center, 1606 West Lawn Ave. NEW TIME: 10 a.m.

David Meyer, Minister............................221-1065

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A thought for next Sunday's service.....

The mountains look on Marathon,
And Marathon looks on the seal
And making there an hour alone,
I dreamed that Greece might still be free.

--Lord Byron

POTTERY AND PRINT SALE DECEMBER 12

Madison artists Betty French and Caroline Greenwald will have a showing and sale of their pottery and prints Sunday, Dec. 12 from noon to 4 p.m. at the Portal Foster Center. Twenty percent of the proceeds will be given to the Prairie Society Social Action Committee.

Betty began working with pottery just four years ago and is now a member of the Madison Potters Guild, teaches at Madison Area Technical College and exhibits at the Madison Art Center and the annual Sidewalk Art Fair.

Caroline has won numerous awards for her fine screen prints and has been in many shows. She is working on a Master of Fine Arts degree at the U.W.

Save your Christmas money 'til Dec. 12 for this great sale.

Women's Alliance of First Society invites all men and women to a Christmas season party Sunday, Dec. 5 at 4 p.m. at the First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Drive, to hear Norman and Mary Richie share their experiences in Kenya and show slides.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE will meet Wednesday, Dec. 8 at 8 p.m. at the home of Rosemary Dorney, 2127 Regent St.

Please bring a GREEN PLANT with you this Sunday, Dec. 5, to help liven up our new home at the Portal Foster Center. Try to make it one that will survive without much sunlight.

Also this Sunday---donate a paperback book to the Book Table. If you find one you want to read, leave 15¢ in its place.

Call Mark or Nancy McElreath, 238-1692 by Friday, Dec. 10 if you have anything for the next Newsletter.