

**Imbolc and Campus Ministry:
Cultivating the space for growth**

Sarah Heartsong, January 31, 2010

Hi! My name, for those who do not know me, is Sarah Heartsong. I carry many titles depending on the situation I find myself in. At work I am either a case manager or supervisor, in Nature-based religious communities I call myself a Sovereign High Priestess, when I am with my daughter I am Mommy, and this year anyway, in this church am the current Chair of the Worship committee and also carry the title of Campus Ministry Coordinator.

We celebrate a Nature-based holiday today. Imbolc, also called Candlemas or Brighid, sits halfway between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox. An ancient Irish saying is, "Washing the hand, the foot, the head; this is the work of Imbolc." This particular season of the year is time for preparing and cultivating the soil for new growth. Part of that process is clearing out the undergrowth and cleaning our house. For the new to come in there must be a space for it to come into. How do we create that space in our personal, our familial, our community, and in our church lives? What things do we need to let go of so that whatever vision we have can shine through into action? This is a time of year for such house cleaning.

This time of year winter's grip upon the land is loosened and the spell of the Cailleach's hammer is broken. The matron of this time of year to the Nature-based Celtic traditions is Brighid. She brings new light and energy into the world. When Her time arrives we all begin to feel the pull of spring. Spring cleaning comes as well as spring fever.

Imbolc is also a time of birthing as we enjoy seeing animals with their offspring. For those that live near the land without a grocery store around the block, the mothers' milk makes fresh cheese, butter and other dairy goodies after the long winter. The dreams of Winter Solstice now need to be set into motion as the land gives us a glimpse of its future bounty. The ideas that we've had for our gardens all the winter season now need to be set down and worked on as our gardens are tilled even as a fire still blazes upon our hearths.

Each of us has Work that is ministry to us. This is Work that lifts our spirits, and fills us with joy and good feelings. It may be challenging, but to us it is extremely meaningful. Our UU Association of Congregations president, Peter Morales, wrote an article in winter's issue of UU World entitled,

What moves you?

We only find ourselves when we lose ourselves in service to something that transcends us.

By [Peter Morales](#)

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I once had a fantasy of giving everyone in my congregation a stole. It was not a practical idea, so one Sunday I resorted to giving everyone an imaginary stole during my sermon.

The point I was making was that each of us has a ministry and that we have a ministry together. More importantly, I truly believe that each of us needs to find that ministry and act upon it in order to be whole. We usually think of our needs in terms of things we want to receive from others—nurture, respect, understanding, love, support. Yet we also need to give.

I want to be clear. We don't just "want" to give of ourselves. We need to give of ourselves. One of the great lessons of all religious traditions is that we only find ourselves when we lose ourselves in service to something that transcends us.

We think of people coming to a congregation because of their spiritual needs. True enough. Yet one of the greatest needs people bring is a need to give of themselves. When I served as a parish minister, it took me a while to fully appreciate this. However, as I spoke with hundreds of people joining our church over the years, I came to see that their need to give was perhaps the greatest need of all. As we spoke with people at our new membership classes and after they joined, we heard over and over about how they wanted to find a place in the church where they could roll up their sleeves and get involved.

This need to give expresses itself in many ways. I remember one woman who had a passion for connecting with the elders of the church. She wanted them to feel connected and respected. She loved to hear their stories. What a gift she was to our church! I know others who feel called to human rights work. The pain of the most oppressed people in our world calls to them, and they work tirelessly for compassion and justice. I know a number of adults who love children and find joy in nurturing our children as they grow.

I am convinced that we too often fail to recognize how much our children, youth, and young adults need to give. Hanging out is not a spiritual practice. Joining hands to work for something we care about is. Service is an essential part of faith development. We need to do so much more to engage the idealism and energy of our young people.

If this movement we love is going to thrive, we absolutely must help all our people find their ministries. This is not about doing something out of a grim sense of duty. This is about helping each other get in touch with what we truly love, what truly moves us.

What moves you? I mean what really touches you at the very core of your being? Are you called to comfort those in pain? Are you called to help make worship a more moving experience? Is music your ministry? What will you do when you let love guide you? What do you need to give?

Imagine your congregation where the love, idealism, passion, and energy of its people are unleashed! Imagine your congregation helping all its people join together to organize and direct their shared passions. Imagine our entire movement when all this wonderful energy is unleashed.

Find your ministry. Put on your imaginary stole. Give yourself away. May our deepest love guide each of us and all of us.

Our church went through an appreciative inquiry process this fall to create vibrant visions for our church community. Our dream for Strong Fellowship suggests we need to reach out into the community to plant the seeds to grow our faith community and to strengthen our bonds together. One of the fertile gardens in our community to plant the seeds in is the NMSU campus. Cultivating interest in our UU values and principles among additional students and faculty holds the promise for a wonderful harvest in the upcoming seasons in spreading our own good news.

This may or may not be part of your calling to ministry. Luckily, we have many areas to serve our community both in church and outside of church. Yet, we don't always step up to the plate to serve. The biggest obstacle I find myself faced with is, "I don't have enough time," or "I may not succeed". When one thinks about things the way that Rev. Morales advocates we find that which gives us joy. Like Joseph Campbell, Rev. Morales tells us to follow our bliss. Yet, more often than not, we are the ones that we have to take out of our own ways. These fears that come up when we think about taking up a calling need to be weeded from our garden as we plant the seeds of our vision.

What fears do you have that arise as you think of your calling? Now go back into the vision that called you and notice the love and joy that called your heart. When you open to accepting your stole in love it changes the fear and gives you courage and strength to move forward.

Today is Imbolc. It is a time of clearing out the old, tilling the earth and setting down the seeds in our garden. We have a tradition in this church of dancing a May pole. When I first arrived it intrigued and attracted me that this congregation had a May pole dance on the schedule. I was excited to participate as I'd not only participated in many May pole ceremonies, but had also facilitated my own within my Nature-based personal traditions. It was with both interest and a little bit of shock that I watched this church pull out its May pole. (This was seven years ago.)

It was heavy, made of metal and was mounted on a tire rim with a ring that screwed onto the top of the pole that rotated. It was something I never experienced before. I was afraid for the people who put it on top of the asphalt in the drive to dance around, afraid it would fall down and hurt someone. Something happened, though. The top had rusted and refused to be screwed on. Nobody knew what to do. The children really wanted to dance, but the top wouldn't screw on. So, you know what we did? We put Joel Brown in the center. We had him hold the ring above his head and danced around him! This gave my Pagan heart quite a chuckle as Joel was danced around, standing as the pole.

The next year I volunteered to obtain a wooden pole, which is more traditional, and lead the dance. I've been a part of the May pole dance every year since then, although certainly do not have ownership of the dance, and hope others stand up this year to do it! The May pole is danced at Beltane, which is halfway between the Spring Equinox and Summer Solstice and is a dance for prosperity and abundance. The pole is danced with prayers for our community that we may have a fertile year.

Traditionally the May pole was taken down by Winter Solstice, where it would be cut into logs and made into the Yule logs burned. Now, Nature-based traditions vary widely in practice and some may do things one way while others do things in another. Basically, after studying many paths, I've come to the understanding that it is the intention that is the most important when taking down something that was put together with prayer. The pole was set in the ground with prayers for prosperity, by a communal process. Now, for the prayer to close in the most powerful way possible, it is important to

honor that process while taking it down to the best of our ability. It really should be taken down by the community as it was put up by the community.

This is a sort of clearing the ground for new Work, for new growth, so that we can set down new seeds and seedlings into the ground for a new season. Because of this, I invite all to join me (after the 2nd service) to process out to the pole and assist with taking it down, then share a meal together in the RE Great room, to be followed by a visioning session for Campus Ministry. Listen to your heart and your love and joy will lead you where you need to go and to the calling that will truly make your heart sing. Clear out the old and bring in the new as you live our affirmation of faith that service is really our prayer.