

**PILGRIMS PROGRESS SEPTEMBER 2009**  
**PILGRIM CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**  
**2802 COMMERCIAL AVENUE, ANACORTES WA 98221**  
**360-293-5675 [WWW.PilgrimUCCSkagit.org](http://WWW.PilgrimUCCSkagit.org)**  
**REVEREND SALLY BALMER, PASTOR AND TEACHER**



***your art and worship committee at work !***

***NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE OR WHERE YOU ARE ON LIFE'S JOURNEY, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE***

***A MESSAGE FROM SALLY***

← In the heart, the water's breaking, with the honey from the bee  
← who can even use our failures; sometimes God can only see.  
← And the fiery sun is blazing, giving warmth, and shining light;  
← this is not a dream I tell you: God is giving us new sight.

*tune: In the Bulb, There is a Flower*

If you are unfamiliar with the tune, or with Antonio Machado's poem "Last Night, as I Lay Sleeping" you may well find the words baffling. Machado's poem offers images from and for the heart: of water, breaking out like a spring and coming on a "secret aqueduct;" of a beehive within, making sweet honey from "old failures;" of fiery sun, making such warmth and light it brings tears. (*You'll find the poem on the web.*) We sang the verse together for our closing one recent Sunday-- thanks to all who indulged my creative attempt.

I share this with you at the suggestion of Densley Palmer. Later he sent me an email, encouraging its inclusion in the newsletter, and noting his own appreciation--in light of our worship gathering-- for that which is "fun, evocative, demanding of imagination." While Denny might be surprised to read his name here, I am struck in considering how little I really "demand" of my imagination. If the church is the place for "the practice of the alternative imagination" (Walter Bruggeman), then listening in for the *demands* of the imagination pushes further. How we perceive--and therefore experience--the earth, God, others--is truly contingent on this faculty through which we (*think about it*) experience everything. No wonder Einstein declared "imagination is more important than knowledge." These words from the one who changed our mechanistic worldview to a time-space of curves and quarks.

The "demands" upon our imagination range from the personal to the theological to....well, how much shall one consider? While I am a great believer in being practical, a faith life of intentional imagination--the life of Jesus being one example-- pushes me further, deeper, wider. At Pilgrim, our considerations range from the burgeoning needs of our building to discussing death, or stolen flags (yes, again), to our Sunday worship gathering. Imagination calls to us like...what? A pom-pom cheerleader, a humming beehive, a lover that wants the best for you. Imagination moves beyond merely the practical or obvious or risk-free. The example that comes to mind is that we are an Open and Affirming church, celebrating not only the rainbow colors but also flying them high on a flag-pole-- how "fun, evocative and demanding of imagination" (and risky, as it turns out) is that?

One faith-ancestor wrote that God's power at work in us "is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." (Eph. 3.20) Do you believe that?

Together, we can set free the push of our sacred imaginations.

Sally

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Sally will be away on some days of vacation and study leave until Wednesday, September 9th. If you have a need for our Care Ministry, please feel free to contact Barb Davis at (360) 424-4662.

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A while back, we invited our military personnel and partners to share their experience in blending their lives in the armed forces with their lives of faith. It was a wonderful time from my own observation and from the perspective of others who attended.

On average, Sally is away one Sunday each month. Past practice has been to find a guest speaker for these Sundays. Ruth Peterson has shouldered this role and has done a fine job.

Are there elements you would like to see us incorporate into a worship service? Please channel these to the Worship and Music Committee through Densley Palmer at [densley.palmer@verizon.net](mailto:densley.palmer@verizon.net).

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Coming up--

Exploring Silence Together:

A day retreat of attending to the Holy, shared with Pilgrim companions

Saturday, October 24th, Camp Brotherhood, Mount Vernon, 9:00 - 3:45, in the chapel building, led by Sally. Sign up and details forthcoming.

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## LUTHERANS LIFT BAN ON GAY CLERGY

WRITTEN BY RELGIOS NEWS SERVICES AUGUST 22, 2009

After a long and contentious debate, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted Friday, August 21 to drop a ban on partnered gay clergy and committed to let people in same-sex relationships serve as leaders of the church.

The ground breaking decision is a dramatic change for the nation's largest Lutheran denomination, which previously permitted openly gay and lesbian clergy as long as they remained celibate.

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### FROM OUR UCC

Written by John H. Thomas  
August 24, 2009

Along with many other Americans I've been thinking about health care this summer. Frankly, it's not something I do very often. On the downhill slope of middle age, I'm blessed with good health that doesn't require a lot of active maintenance and, more to the point, I and all of my extended family have good health insurance through a combination of private and public options. But this month's dueling television commercials, outraged talk show hosts, and town meeting shout-outs have prompted a bit more reflection about the benefits I tend to take for granted.



Early in August I scheduled my annual physical. My family physician is pretty low-tech, relying on touch, sight, and sound as much as elaborate tests, so it's not a terribly expensive visit. Operating on the "most things get better" principle, we tend to wait and see before embarking on expensive treatments. The EKG will cost a bit, but my \$25 copay and a modest deductible will hardly be noticeable. The blood work bill was initially a few hundred dollars, but after the insurance paid its share, and the provider made the mysterious "adjustment," I only had to write out a check for \$6.65!

My doctor and I decided I should have some growths on my shoulder and back looked at. So off I went to a surgeon last week. (It's nice not to have to wait months for a clinic appointment.) Filling out the insurance forms and paying my \$25 copay took longer than the consultation. We agreed that some minor surgery is advisable, so I have an appointment in early September. That will be expensive, as will the pathology work, but my insurance will cover most of it. Should we be surprised with an unpleasant finding there may be things to worry about, but money won't be among them.

I renewed my blood pressure medicine on-line yesterday. A couple of months of the generic will cost me \$35. I really have no idea what I'd have to pay without a prescription drug plan. And the company that provides a breathing machine to help me with my sleep apnea called to tell me my insurance will probably cover the cost of a new mask. "Just call when you want a replacement."

Pretty boring, unremarkable stuff! The primary obstacle to health care for me is not cost, but making appointments in the midst of a busy schedule of work and travel. Forty-seven million Americans don't share my experience, many of whom are dealing with health issues that far eclipse mine. It's not that I'm smarter than they are, have made better decisions, am morally superior, or even that I work harder. My life is easy compared to single mothers working two jobs without health care. I'm just plain lucky that I have a job that pays well and that offers a health plan emphasizing wellness and prevention. And if I would ride my bike more, or walk more, and avoid the pre-dinner drink or the in between meal snack more often, I'd be even luckier!

At age 59 I'll probably make it to Medicare with my health insurance coverage intact. If for some reason I don't, I'll have to do some rationing. I'd probably stop taking the blood pressure pills. My hypertension isn't bad enough that I'd risk an immediate stroke, but over time the impact on my heart could be significant. I would hand in the breathing machine, but the cumulative effect of restless, sleepless nights over time would take its toll. And those growths on my back? They're probably not skin cancer. Probably. So I could put that off. And I could easily skip next year's annual physical. In other words, I could do what 47 million Americans do every day. I could put my future well-being at risk. And the financial cost to everyone of my "deferred maintenance" could be huge.

Amid all the rage and noise of the health care reform debate there are millions of mundane stories like my own. Except they're not mundane for me. The fact that over 47 million of our neighbors can't tell stories like mine is wrong. It's just wrong. Many of us, for now, can literally "afford" to sit out this debate out and let the politicians and the medical industry battle it out. Many cannot afford to be indifferent now, and our own ability to afford indifference to the plight of the uninsured may not last very long either. Isn't it time for all of us to think long and hard about health care?

John H. Thomas  
General Minister and President  
United Church of Christ



Take Action!

 UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

[Home: Justice and Witness Ministries](#)

Justice and Witness Ministries of the United Church of Christ (UCC) has long played a part in exposing environmental racism. In 1982, the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice was part of the struggle to expose environmental racism in Warren County, North Carolina. Inspired by that incident, the Commission published its landmark study in 1987, Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States. It proved that race was the most common variable in predicting where commercial hazardous waste facilities are located in the United States .

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**Learn more. Read an [open letter](#) from JWM Executive Minister, Rev. Linda Jaramillo.**

For the last 6 years Sheila Holt-Orsted has been fighting for the clean-up of her family's well in Dickson , TN. The family's well water has been contaminated with TCE, a dangerous and deadly toxin. For the last 2 years, however, Sheila has been protesting without the help of her father, Harry Holt, who died of cancer.



All the Holt family members that lived on the property—which their ancestors owned post-slavery—suffer from disease. Stories like this are part of the larger saga of environmental racism happening all over the United States .

**[Your help is needed to bring their story to national attention so governmental agencies will do their jobs and end this contamination. Please take action for this cause by sending a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency or joining us for a rally in Dickson, TN.](#)**

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*Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed"*

-Hebrews 12:2 [The Message Bible]



**[Aeeded now more than ever to protect our moral values in reform proposals! Don't be silent! Call the White House today!](#)**

As people of faith we believe that the race is not given to the swift or to the strong but to those who endure to the end. The road to health care reform is long, and we are all growing weary of the bitterness, hatred, and lies that have consumed the current debate. And though we are distressed by the tone of this dialog we know that we cannot give up. We must continue to fight for a health care system in this country that extends care and coverage to everyone!

After more than 140,000 people of faith participated in a call with President Obama last week, the faith community has been emboldened and empowered to stand together and raise the moral voice in calling for a health care system that covers all.

We ask that you continue to pray, march, write letters and call your representatives and senators. In light of recent events we are asking that you concentrate your advocacy efforts on the following action next week:

**[Call the White House and let the President know that the faith community stands with him to reform the nation's health care system.](#)**

Use our toll-free number: 1-888-797-8717. It will connect you with the White House Comment Line. Please relay the following message:

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1. Identify yourself and as a member of the United Church of Christ.
2. Let the President know that the UCC supports a robust public option and we ask that he does not back down from including this in the final bill. A robust public option will help make sure that those who are uninsured will have a choice and have access to needed health care that is affordable

## Worship and Music

August 15, 2009 Summary

Present: Sally Balmer, Joan Bissell, Janet Miller, Ruth Peterson, Densley Palmer

### Review of recent services—

The group was agreeable to inviting both Barbara Gilday and Jerry Bongard in the future.

### Looking ahead

Communion assignments

- September: Ruth
- October: Janet
- November: Joan (bread) Densley prep
- December: Janet

Dates Sally will be away

- August 30 *Roger Ridgeway speaking*
- September 6 (*Labor Day weekend*) *Barbara Gilday speaking*
- October 11 *Bill Malcomson speaking*

### October 4. World Communion Sunday, month-long emphasis

on global ministries.

**October 25: Reformation Sunday:** Sally will speak with the Guemes pastor about a pulpit exchange on this Sunday.

Densley will raise joint activities with the Guemes congregation at council.

### November 29 Advent begins

Members of the congregation will be invited to write brief statements about the meaning of “Advent” in their lives and, perhaps, read these as part of Advent season services. To be coordinated with Sally.

Joan will write instructions for this activity. *Committee members were asked to send their own statements to Joan via email.*

### Other▪ Amplification during the service

Janet will speak to Tom about number of mike jacks on the amplifier, whether PCC has an FM mike beyond the lapel mike, and whether mikes can be used at the same time.

- Oyster Run: Welcome message on front sign

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**Next Meeting: Saturday, September 19 , 9 AM at the church. Upstairs**

