

In The Interim

When the star the ancient Romans named Sirius comes closest to the sun, the dog days of summer are upon us. Sirius is the largest star in the constellation Canis Major. Thus the dog days, when all manner of creatures become languid, wine turns sour, and things generally bog down. Why, then, is this the time each year when interim ministers move to their new towns and begin new ministries? Why are my husband Barry and I unpacking and setting up our new home during this stretch of heat and humidity? Why am I trying to conjure up words of wisdom, the first that I get to offer to you, when my brain is slogging along in low gear?

Instead of attempting to answer these imponderable philosophical questions, I decided to fall back on a story that captures the essence of the first message I want to share with you. Every interim congregation I serve gets to hear this story at some point. You can thank the dog days for the fact that I'm trotting it out first thing.

Several years ago at General Assembly, Rev. Judith Walker-Riggs spoke to our minister's gathering about the importance of avoiding getting so stuck in cherished customs that we miss important opportunities to change direction and make a difference. She read us this brief radio transcript supposedly from the US Chief of Naval Operations, October 10, 1995.

Station 1: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision.

Station 2: Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

Station 1: This is the captain of a US Navy ship. I say again divert your course.

Station 2: No, I say again, divert your course.

Station 1: This is the Aircraft Carrier Enterprise. We are a large warship of the US Navy. Divert your course now!!

Station 2: This is the Puget Sound lighthouse. It's your call.

The story may be apocryphal, but the moral is true. As we begin our time of interim ministry together, remember that it is your call. I am here to advise and consult, to offer an outsider perspective. The ultimate decisions as to the shape and direction of your future are up to you. It is possible for an aircraft carrier to change direction given time and patience and the requisite skills. You can go where you want to go. It's your call.

Now for some practical information. I will be available for appointments on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, with some week-end availability as well. Please call the office or email me to schedule an appointment. Thursday will be writing/study day. I will work from home and will respond to email and phone calls. Friday will be my day off. I ask that you not expect responses to routine emails on Fridays and that you not call me except in an emergency. I always have my cell phone with me for emergencies. When I begin work on August 1 I will make sure the number is easily available.

In spite of the dog days, I am delighted to be here in Burlington, and I am delighted to be starting an interim ministry with you. I look forward to talking with you, listening to you,

worshipping and learning with you. In these dog days, let's slow down, enjoy the excuse to be languid and lazy, and hope that our wine doesn't sour!

Rev. Roberta