At the Intersection of Despair and Love

BY **JAN CARLSSON-BULL**, MINISTER, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH IN MERIDEN, CONNECTICUT

Quest

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My connection with the Unitarian Universalist Trauma Response Ministry began September 26, 2001. It was just fifteen days after the perilous events in New York City, Washington, DC, and western Pennsylvania. As a minister at All Souls Church in New York City, I had to do something to help downtown. Our congregants were being tended to, and I was part of that, but I needed to carry my ministry to the epicenter of the devastation.

With some savvy assistance from my colleagues and the bravado of Bob Ossner, a self-described Protestant fundamentalist fire chaplain from Chicago, I spent the night of September 26 at Ground Zero, at what was known as "the pit." I was the only chaplain in that sector of what was still called the rescue operation. All around were firemen, policemen, crane operators, asbestos technicians, structural engineers, and FBI agents.

What did I do? Mostly, I listened, after leading with, "How ya doin'?" I was identified by a hardhat with the word CHAPLAIN hastily printed on it with magic marker. Bob had said to me, "Anything that's found that says a life was here… anything…is a blessing. It's closure for one more family. And we pray around that discovery; in an arms-over-shoulders huddle, we pray." In the eerie light of dawn, that's exactly what we did.

As I stood at the edge of the pit, I hoped against hope. Not just that there might be some visible life movement. I prayed and hoped that we might find a way to contain further violence without wreaking international havoc.

A few hours after sunrise, I headed back toward St. Paul's Chapel, the host site for the recovery operation. Almost there, I spotted a crew of sanitation workers. I walked up to them and thanked them for the work they were doing. "It really feels good to hear that," they said. One fellow looked at me with a tired smile. "Clean souls rest easy, Rev., clean souls rest easy."

In the months that followed I continued my ministry at All Souls and extended it to the Family Assistance Center, set up in the expanses of a hangar-like structure on Pier 94, stretching out into the Hudson River. It housed the array of service providers for surviving family members and New Yorkers numbering in the thousands who had been displaced from job or home or both. The Red Cross was one of many service providers that took up residence there.

One morning in mid-October, I was wandering about the formidable expanse of this site and sat down next to a young man in his mid-20s. Let's call him Chad. He had worked in the South Tower, the first building hit and the last to collapse. Chad was high enough up so that his narrow escape was the upshot of a heartbeat decision. He had lost friends and co-workers, many of them. While shaken, he wasn't shattered. While reflective, he didn't allow himself to freeze into the terror of those unforgettable moments.

In the high-tech high-rise world in which he had worked, this young man had made it a habit of bringing his guitar to play during lunchtime and coffee breaks. His colleagues had loved it. As his story continued to unfurl, so did his smile. He spoke of his drive to write music. Then his voice dropped. "In the last weeks," he told me, "I just haven't been able to write anything." "And now?" I asked. "What about now?"

Hope is patience with the lamp lit.
—Tertullian

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT HOPE

"Most of the time, I can't even play," came the reply. "Hmm," I murmured. "I'm guessing, Chad, that everything you've seen and heard and felt is stirring inside you into songs that will remind us, as only music can, of what happened." "Really," he said. "You really think so?" "Yes," I replied. "I really think so, and I'll be waiting to hear them." His smile settled into a mellow glow and an unspoken promise that we all will hear those songs.

I have no idea what Chad is doing now, what kind of job he found, if he's playing his guitar in his new workplace, or if the notes stumbling around inside him have coalesced into that first song. I just held hope that there were songs in gestation that would carry haunting echoes of that time before easing their way into the rest of his life.

That same month some of my ministerial colleagues and I began to confer about forming a distinctively Unitarian Universalist ministry for trauma response. The mission of the UU Trauma Response Ministry we created out of those conversations is to provide multi-faith and culturally sensitive spiritual care to survivors of mass disasters and other trauma. We offer resources that include education and training on congregational preparedness, liturgy resources, and informed response to the needs of our children and youth. We collaborate with organizations that are similarly focused. By invitation only, we deploy trauma response teams to sites of disaster and crisis.

What prepares and sustains us to do this work? Education, training in the specifics of trauma response, collegial support, and a theology grounded in hope. John Schneider was a seasoned trauma psychologist and one of those who helped us further define and practice the ministry of trauma response. His teachings ring true for me:

> *Perhaps the most important dimension of witnessing [particular moments that jar and uproot] is our ability to hold hope for another… Sometimes people say, "I can't imagine ever recovering from this" or "Do you ever think it will be better?" or "Can I make it?" To say at such times that we do believe it can be better, though all evidence seems contrary at the moment, is an offer to "hold hope." Holding hope can be a spiritual covenant we enter with a person…. It may not be until later that people feel empowered enough to hold their own hope.*

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—John Schneider

In the meantime, we carry, sometimes embodied by a non-anxious presence, "the belief that within each person, no matter how powerful the truth, given the resources and time provided to deal with that truth, we have the strength and potential to handle it."

Hope is a spiritual posture. It is the spiritual underpinning of our trauma response ministry and the bottom-line reason that I'm engaged in this ministry.

One day, en route to a UU Trauma Response retreat and looking for some respite during the long flight, I reached for one of those airline magazines and gravitated to a sidebar story about a unique spiral staircase in a Sisters of Loretto chapel in downtown Santa Fe, NM. I had seen photographs of it before and was intrigued. The stairway, connecting the ground floor with the choir loft, is marked by two 360-degree turns and no visible means of support. Aesthetically compelling and architecturally bewildering, it has become a hub of legend.

It turns out that on the same plane was Dr. Rosemary Chinnici, who was then Professor of Pastoral Theology at Starr King School for the Ministry. In addition, Rosemary is also Sister Chinnici, a member of the Sisters of Loretto, a women's religious order within Roman Catholicism. She is witty, brilliant, and full of P and V (petulance and vigor). Our plane landed and I hailed Rosemary. "You're a member of the Sisters of Loretto, right?" I queried. "Yes," she affirmed. "Well what can you tell me in the next five minutes about that spiral staircase at the Loretto Chapel in Santa Fe?" "Oh that," she quipped. "I'll tell you what happened, the myth and the reality."

According to Rosemary, in 1820, just eight years after the founding of the Sisters of Loretto in Kentucky, the order was asked to send a delegation to found schools in New Mexico. Six sisters set out by wagon train on the arduous journey. Only four of them made it to Santa Fe, but those four stalwarts founded the first school there. In the process, they oversaw construction of a chapel. There was a chancel, a seating area, and a choir loft that was created by leaning ladders against the rear walls. All seemed complete until the reality dawned that there was no way to reach the choir loft once the ladders came down.

The sisters prayed to St. Joseph, the patron saint of carpentry. An itinerant carpenter appeared and built the staircase, that spiral miracle with two 360-degree turns and no central source of support. The wood that he used was not native to the area around Santa Fe. In the middle of the night he disappeared, before they could pay him for the work.

Myth takes over. It was surely St. Joseph himself who erected the staircase. How else to explain the extraordinary coil with no visible means of support, let alone the vanishing workman?

Well, a decade or so ago a family was moving from Canyon City, Colorado.

In the process of cleaning out their attic, they discovered the original plans for that staircase, along with other records documenting what had happened. Evidently, one of their relatives had been the itinerant carpenter. He had gone to Santa Fe with his own supply of Colorado pinewood and, at the sisters' request, had constructed the spiral staircase.

Just after its completion, a letter came from home. His wife was ill. In the middle of the night he headed north, before he could receive any compensation for his remarkable feat. Subsequent research has revealed his likely familiarity with the construction of similar staircases in France.

When Rosemary Chinnici was a child, she ventured to this chapel with her father, a structural engineer. Invited by a guide to ascend to the choir loft, her readiness to do so was dampened by her father's voice: "Don't put a step on that staircase. There is no reason why it should even be standing."

Nonetheless it stands and it holds. Hope is like that. It's not a miracle, but how it evolves is commonly inexplicable until much later, sometimes generations later.

Hope is the recognition of promise imparted by a sanitation worker at Ground Zero. Hope is a song that resides nascent in a young man who once played a guitar in a building that stood there.

Hope is a spring that waters a ministry called trauma response. Hope is a spiral that ascends to a choir loft in a chapel visited by an itinerant carpenter. Hope lies at the improbable intersection of despair and love.

Hope arises in the promise of the possible and the presence of each of us for the other. We are holders of hope. As holders of hope, we are healers in a fractured world. Ours is the ministry of hope. ■

The Hope of Our Ancestors

BY **LENA K. GARDNER**, CLF MEMBERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

This piece was originally presented at a #BlackLivesMatter vigil at the First Universalist Church of Minneapolis.

My heart is aching for answers, for a way this makes sense, for a way to understand a 12-year old child shot, a way to understand Eric Garner, a father of six, choked to death in broad daylight with his murderers caught on camera—no medical attention, left to die in the street just like Michael Brown, who also received no medical attention. As if their lives didn't matter, as if they were not human.

I want someone to tell me it's going to be okay. I wanted someone to tell me there is a way through this, that there is something that will save us from this pain (a pain that will divide us more deeply if we are not careful).

I want someone to say there is a right path to justice, a safe path toward freedom, a path that doesn't allow fear and despair to overwhelm my heart. I want the comfort of my father's presence—even if it's just so we can cry together. But when I face the world as it is, my Dad is still lost to cancer and these murders don't make sense.

And I realize again that my Dad is still dead. This is something you don't understand until you've lost someone—when time and time again you pick up the phone to call them and they're still gone. Sometimes I can laugh a little, and say: Yep, I was just checking, just making sure there is still no Dad in my contacts. He's still not there.

Yet when I lay on the ground for 4.5 minutes during a die-in, I actually heard his voice in my mind, along with my Grandpa, telling me: *When people ask you what you are, you say "I am Black and I belong to the human race." Don't let hate take you down*. I felt the presence of what I can only call my ancestors, and their voices echoed in my heart. They called to me, saying: *You. It's you, Lena*. These past few nights they've beckoned to me in my sleep: *Wake now. There is so much work to do.* They whispered to me: *We love you. The world is scary, and you are strong, not because you don't need anyone, but because you need everyone.*

I need everyone.

So in this time I have seen my white friends stand up to their family members with tears in their eyes and with a strength I know that I would not have had if I needed to stand up to my own father in the same way. And I see my Black people, the very ones who love me, who raised me, who claim me with my light skin and hazel eyes as their own, and I see them carrying the sadness, the anger, the pain, and the continued denial of justice. I see my other brown-skinned folks enmeshed in their own fights for justice, uniting with us because we know our fates are tied together and we need each other.

In my heart, I know that we must find each other first, so that we may stumble upon hope together. I am not talking about a fluffy hope that feels light and squishy. I'm talking about the hope of our ancestors that has carried us here; the hope that broke the chains of slavery, made a new life possible for a people who defiantly refused to be broken; the hope that sustained them through the darkest nights, hunted by dogs like animals fleeing toward freedom. It is this very hope that we *all* must stand on now. This is the unrelenting hope of life's most basic promise—the hope to stay alive.

This is the hope that carries people across artificial borders, through treacherous terrain, so that they may have a better chance. This is the hope that moves our transgender people into living the truth of their lives, even when living that truth literally puts their lives at risk. This is the very same hope that, during times past, urged our white allies to shutter safe houses and cover basement doors to protect human souls from slavery's long tentacles. This is the hope that those who came before us lived in, because in their hearts they knew, in their souls they knew.

They knew just as we know now: we cannot let injustice stand. They knew cruelty for what it was. They looked at their own hands and hearts and said, *It's on me, I can do something.* I do not doubt that every single one of them had fear in their hearts. Some cast it out with Jesus' love, some kept it at bay through sheer determination and stubbornness, and I am sure some laughed it away. However they moved through the fear, it was always anchored in the same hope we must anchor to now. It is this hope we must grab hold of in our hearts and let spread like wildfire until it turns to unshakeable trust—in each other, in our power to work for justice. It is a hope we inherited.

Some other things we inherited from our ancestors stick to our consciousness like tar, threatening to suffocate us, but the hope we inherited is different. It can be nearly impossible to hold onto, because if you do, it will call you onto a different path. To hope for a more just world is to believe in our ability to create it. And whatever else it means, believing in our ability to create a new world means we have to tear something down. We have to tear down what isn't working in our hearts and in the world around us. And we can only tear down and build up if we come together.

Now, I dare say that my Dad, who fought racism all his life and taught me how to see injustice for what it was, had too little hope. Yet he still worked ceaselessly against racism. Up until he was diagnosed with the cancer that took his life he fought—and at times rage consumed him. I will not let rage consume me. For me it is hope that quells the rage.

I make space for rage and then, after it's had its time, I make space for hope. I am holding onto the ferocity of the hope of my ancestors, who with that hope laid siege to the empire of slavery. Even as we still struggle, I know our work is to face the pain together, to stay awake, and in doing so, to be led down a path toward justice.

When I am out doing a direct action, I am terrified most of the time. But what I am usually most afraid of are the thoughts in my own head—the thoughts that tell me: *You shouldn't be on this interstate. You shouldn't be shutting down traffic. That police officer just asked us to stop—we should listen.* But then I think about what brought me out, and I hear those voices: *It's you, Lena. Wake now—there is much work to do. We love you. You are strong not because you don't need anyone, but because you need everyone.*

Frederick Douglass said, "Who would be free themselves, must strike the blow." That is true for all of us. To my brown and Black people of all shades and cultures, who speak different languages and come from different continents, I need you. For my white people too, I need you. For whatever reason, these most recent deaths of young, Black boys and men have shaken more people awake than ever before. We need each other. Our hope is here. Together. Now.

Please don't go back to sleep. It's too easy to walk away from this pain, for all of us. It's too easy to try to return back to our everyday lives, thinking, *Well, there is nothing I can do. Other people will fix this*. It's easy to try to turn away from the sheer immensity of the pain in front of us. We try to rationalize it, but sooner or later you can't explain it away.

I am asking you to face the pain. To look it square in the face. We need to do this not only so we stay awake, but also so that together we can stand on the hope of our ancestors and have the courage to say we will build another world in our hearts, in our city, in our homes. And it is not easy.

So together, we must find the things that need tearing down, the empires within our hearts that would allow injustice to make sense, that scare us away from having real conversations about race. For me those things include believing that I can't speak at the public hearing because I'm not articulate enough, or I can't call my city councilperson because I don't know everything about that policy or exactly how to read a budget. I am afraid of all those white people in that room and that they'll think of me as just another angry Black woman, so I can't go speak in that meeting.

But if we are going to tear down the empire we must face what's in our own hearts—the pain, the voices of the empire that tell us we can't change things. We can face the pain together, but alone it will crush us. *I am not strong because I don't need anyone, I am strong because I need everyone.* We can face this together.

I close with a quote from Indian author and activist Arundhati Roy. She says, in her book *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*:

> *Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and our ability to tell our own stories….*
>
> *Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them.*
>
> *Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.* ■

Hope Has Human Hands (Excerpt)

BY REV. ELIZABETH "**KIT" KETCHAM**, PACIFIC UU FELLOWSHIP, ASTORIA, OREGON

In the late 1940s and early 50s, there was a song which, when it came on the radio, would make my dad groan and move as if to turn it off, muttering "That darn song, it's so sticky!" and my mother and I would cry out, "No, we want to hear it!" It was a terrifically sentimental song with words that could even be said to be sappy, schmaltzy, syrupy:

Soft as the voice of an angel,
breathing a lesson unheard,
Hope with a gentle persuasion whispers her comforting word:
Wait till the darkness is over,
Wait till the tempest is done,
Hope for the sunshine tomorrow, after the shower is gone.
Whispering Hope, oh how welcome thy voice,
Making my heart, in its sorrow, rejoice.

In those days, hope to me meant miracles; it meant a sort of Pollyanna-like optimism: "Everything will be fine in the morning." It meant that no matter how desperate the financial situation of our family, we would have food on the table; someone from my dad's little Baptist congregation would deposit a freshly killed Canada goose or venison roast or string of fish on our doorstep.

Hope, in my young mind, was a kind of insurance policy, a belief that God would not desert us if we were faithful. Hope provided for miraculous recoveries, last-minute rescues. It meant that the sun would always rise, that spring followed winter, seeds would grow, birth would produce new life, and the Lone Ranger *would* arrive on time!

Over the years, as I've examined faith in light of my own experience, I have gradually revamped my thoughts about Hope as a religious concept. It seems to me that the Hope innate in the human spirit is more than simply a wish for good outcomes, for peace on earth, or a politically correct holiday greeting. Hope is far more than clichés or a wish for miracles. It is not trivial or sentimental.

The definition I've come up with after many years of observing my own need for hope and the moments which seem to create hope for me and others is this: *Hope is my awareness, my deep understanding, that I am connected to the inextinguishable stream of life, that I am part of the whole.*

> When we offer hope to ourselves and to one another...we knit up the rips and tears in the interdependent web of existence and bring each other closer to spiritual wholeness.

Let me repeat that definition and ask you to compare your own experiences to it. For me, hope is the clear sense that I am a part of the inextinguishable, inexhaustible stream of life. It is a tangible sense of my place in the universe. It is the fiber of the interdependent web of all existence, the connection I have to all else in life.

When I have lost hope, I have lost my sense that I belong to the universe, to the web, to life itself. But hope is strengthened in me with every reminder I receive of that connection. It may start when I first see the tomato seedling pop up in the seed tray on my windowsill. It may be triggered by the purring of the fuzzy kitten on my lap as I read. Even a stranger's greeting on the sidewalk or beach may evoke a warmth that reminds me that I do belong here, I am a part of life.

Hope is found in relationship, whether with my pets, friends and family, strangers, all of nature or with God, if you are comfortable with that word.

If religion is defined as the expression of human relationship with self, others and the universe, then hope is a manifestation of that relationship and a valuable piece of our active faith. Unitarian Universalists mostly do not hope for a heavenly home; we hope for an earthly home that is heavenly and we know that it is our job to build that home.

A friend once talked with me about her second biopsy for breast cancer. "I was scared to death," she said. "I'd already had one surgery and was terrified that this was the beginning of the end. I felt loose from my moorings, adrift, disconnected, hopeless. And I knew I couldn't bear it without help. The nurse started to move away from me after the test, and I said to her, 'I need you to hold on to me.' She took my hand and I felt myself re-connect with life. She gave me more hope than a negative biopsy."

When we offer hope to ourselves and to one another, with each smile, each touch, each act of kindness and understanding, we knit up the rips and tears in the

interdependent web of existence and bring each other closer to spiritual wholeness. ■

From Your Minister

BY **MEG RILEY**
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

For years, one of my favorite hymns of hope has been Carolyn McDade's "We'll Build a Land." It opens with: "We'll build a land where we bind up the broken; we'll build a land where the captives go free…" It is a song affirming a better world ahead, which we can build together. The chorus begins, "Come build a land where sisters and brothers, anointed by God, may then create peace…"

I have often requested this hymn when I preached about social justice issues, as a rallying cry of unity to close the service. It challenged, comforted, and centered me.

And then I heard a Native American UU say that the hymn is very hurtful for her. To hear rooms full of white people singing about building a land does not bring hope to her; it brings grief and anger. I heard her say this, but truthfully, I didn't listen to her. My inner voice—the all-knowing voice of whiteness I have been trained to respect and obey—said something like, "My, she is oversensitive. This is a Biblical text—the words are adapted from Amos and Isaiah, written long before Columbus even sailed to 'the New World.' And anyway, I love it."

Of course, I didn't say that out loud. We who have privilege, who choose the songs, don't have to speak out loud—most of the time we just quietly presume that we know better, and keep doing what we are doing. Had I said it out loud, perhaps she could have corrected my ignorance sooner. As it was, I probably continued to sing the song for another five years before I was introduced to the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. Then I realized with a start just how much Biblical narratives were, *and continue to be* used in legal authorization for past and ongoing theft of Indian lands and rights.

For years, I located my hope in the beautiful, compelling, words of this song—in affirmations of a better world that we could someday make. But at some point—and it was a gradual waking up, not a sudden one—I realized that this beautiful future is not, actually, where I might find hope. Hope is found in transforming narratives of oppression and injustice into new stories of equality and justice—and that always has to happen in the present. You can't move from the past to the future without going through the present!

> Hope is found in transforming narratives of oppression and injustice into new stories of equality and justice….

For me, finding hope in the present means that I look away from the mountaintop, where people might someday stand like "oaks of righteousness," and I look into the valley of the relationships right around me. In all of their imperfection. At some point, and slowly, I realized that in this case, real hope was to be found by listening to the Native American people right next to me, honoring what they were saying, understanding the harm that this narrative does, and ceasing to sing that song. It meant deciding that I was more committed to right relationship in the present than to poetry about a beautiful future.

(Later, I learned that others also felt excluded by this particular song—folks who don't live on the gender binary and consider themselves left out from the "sisters and brothers" who would be anointed by God to create peace.)

I still love the song, though I don't request it any more. I know Carolyn McDade, who put that scripture to music, and I love her. I also know that she is an activist to her bones and would never want anyone to be hurt by her words. This is not a message that she is bad, or the song is bad, or I am bad for singing it. It is a message about inclusive hope.

Grounded in knowledge derived from the hardest times in my life, not from books or abstract ideas, here's what I have come to believe about hope: Hope has to be found in the present, and the only way to find it is to create it. The only way to create it is to take risks, to try something new when the old ways hurt. In those parts of ourselves that have privilege, what is generally new is listening to those who do not share that privilege.

Hope means interrupting the authoritative inner voice—one white woman I know calls this voice *Super-Whitey*—the inner voice that assures us we already know everything that matters. Hope is found as we admit that we can't ever know what it is like to *not* have the privileges we have. Hope emerges as we recognize that we can listen to those who do not have those same privileges, and believe them, thus expanding what we know.

Paul Wellstone, greatly beloved and still-missed senator from my home state of Minnesota, said: "Politics is what we do; politics is what we create, by what we work for, by what we hope for and what we dare to imagine." He was a politician, speaking about politics, but he was also talking about hope.

Hope is what we do. Hope is what we create, by what we work for, what we hope for and what we dare to imagine. ■

REsources for Living

BY **LYNN UNGAR**, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Christmas is a season of hope. If you're a kid, it's probably a season of hoping for presents. There are lists you give to parents and letters you send to Santa and lots of waiting and hoping for the very best of loot. If you think about it, that's the way many of us who are grown up think of hope. We hope for a better job or a better car or nice weather on the weekend we're going camping. We may not expect that Santa is going to bring us what we want, but we have a list of desires, and a lot of hope that they will be fulfilled.

Of course, the problem with that kind of hope is that you almost never get everything that's on your list, so you're sure to be disappointed. And even when Santa comes through for you in a big way, there's always a new thing to add to the list, a new wish to be fulfilled. When our hope rests in the list of things that we want, there's never really a way to be fully satisfied.

But true Christmas hope is really quite a different thing. Christmas hope rests in a baby, a baby who we are told offers a promise of salvation. That's not at all the same thing as a list for Santa. For starters, there's the matter of a baby. Now, anyone who is a parent can tell you that we harbor a lot of hopes for our kids. Babies are cute, squishy bundles of potential, and parents lay all kinds of wishes on those new lives. We hope that our children will be happy and healthy, that they will grow up to make the world a better place. And oftentimes we hope a whole list of things: that they will share our love of music or football, that they will get into a prestigious college, that they will star on the track team, that they will take care of us when we're old.

And, of course, as with all wish lists, chances are good we will be disappointed. Children have a way of being interested in what they like, gifted in unpredictable ways, led by their own stars onto paths that we could never have predicted. If your hopes for your children start looking like a list for Santa, you not only risk disappointment, you risk trying to push another human being into a mold that doesn't really suit them.

> Christmas hope rests in a baby, a baby who we are told offers a promise of salvation.

The kind of hope that works with babies is a different kind of hope. A Christmas kind of hope. It is a hope that lives in an open heart that longs for the best, but admits that we never quite know what the best will be. It is a hope that is more about listening and watching than about making sure that everything turns out the way you planned. It is hope that stands in awe in front of the cradle, knowing that you are at the beginning of an important story without any idea of how the story will turn out.

Of course, while Mary was there in the barn, holding her baby with a heart full of hope, there isn't a chance in the world that she was looking forward to what was actually going to happen. Even if the story is true that angels appeared to Mary, announcing that she would carry the child of God, they never bothered to mention that he would be brutally murdered as a young man. No parent puts that into a story line they imagine for their child. No one hopes that terrible things will happen to their children, any more than anyone really hopes that their child will turn out to be a savior.

But, in fact, terrible things do happen all the time. So do saviors. It's just that salvation is really more along the lines of hope for a baby than hope for a Santa Claus list. Salvation basically means "healing." (It comes from the same root as "salve.") And healing comes from all kinds of sources and in all kinds of forms that you might not expect. It is entirely possible that any given baby will bring healing to the world in some form or another.

No person will keep the terrible things from happening. No one can fulfill all our hopes for a life made of only comfort and safety and pleasure. That's the wrong kind of hope. But any given person has the potential—even the likelihood—of bringing some kind of salvation, some kind of healing to this world where terrible things just keep on happening.

And so, when we're able, we live in Christmas hope. Not the expectation that everything we desire will magically appear in a moment under a glistening tree—although it's great when that happens. Rather, we live in the hope that we can be both givers and receivers of the ongoing gift of healing, meeting the story of the world, in all of its unpredictable twists and turns, with a heart that is open and full of hope. ■

For many, the month of December is a time of stillness and cold, and it can be lonely. So we warm it up by welcoming love back, ushering in the return of light, and celebrating the resilience of our communities. However you celebrate this month, the CLF celebrates with you. We need your help to continue bringing light to thousands across the globe. In the spirit of generosity, love and light that this season can bring, please make a gift of $100 today. You can give online at http://www.clfuu.org/give or call us at 1-800-231-3027.■

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Hope

BY **LYNN UNGAR**, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING,
CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Hope wakes up in her green-lit room,
stretches, tugs at her flannel nightie,
opens her limbs to the morning.

In a moment Hope will climb down,
demand cereal, contemplate
what she wants to look like today.

In a moment the day will start to unwind,
lunchbox, sandals, numbers and glue,
gathering tarnish as it goes.

In just a moment the apple will fall,
the toast will burn, the pencil break.
But for now it's enough that Hope awakes,
slipping slowly into the lap of another day.

From Lynn Ungar's book of poetry Bread and Other Miracles, *published by Authorhouse in 2012, and available through lynnungar.com or Amazon.com.*