

CRIBB<S>NOTE

We are pleased to welcome our Conference Minister the Rev. Dr. Jane Heckles to the pulpit this morning. After many years of service to the United Church of Christ and the Southern California Nevada Conference, Jane will leave her post next month. Her sensitivity to pastoral ministry has been a real gift to the congregations she has helped. She pushed us into the digital age and worked very hard to keep the UCC relevant in our commitment to social justice.

All of us are invited to share a time of recognition of her ministry and celebration of her leadership along with our other Conference Minister the Rev. Dan Romero, on Saturday afternoon, December 8, at First Congregational Church in Long Beach.

Thank you, Jane, for allowing God to work through you as a source of tremendous blessing to our conference and the UCC.

We never know how God will use us. Life by definition is a faith journey. The other day I received a telephone call from friend in Atlanta. He had just helped to move his son from Rancho Cucamonga back to Georgia. His son had been studying out here to become an automotive mechanic. While driving across country in a truck loaded with all his son's belongings, they encountered mechanical problems. The fuel pump went out.

There, on the side of the highway in Louisiana, they were stuck for nearly 12 hours repairing the problem. My friend said he was very proud of his son because he was able to drop the gas tank that apparently was filled up, and remove the fuel pump. A state trooper came along and offered to help. He gave them a ride to the nearest auto parts store and brought them back. Once the new fuel pump was installed and the gas tank replaced, they discovered the battery was dead. The emergency flashers had drained the battery. My friend said it wasn't long before a motorist came by and stopped. He asked them what the problem was, and gave them a ride to purchase a battery.

As he conveyed his adventure, my friend said he had to write a letter to the supervisor of the state trooper to express his appreciation. "If he had been abusive, I would have written a letter," he said. "I have to write about his goodness and how much he helped us while we were stranded," he continued.

What struck me most about our conversation was the next thing he said, "I don't expect miracles." He paused and then added, "I accept them." He went on to explain the help they got from the state trooper and motorist happens all the time. "I'm not saying I'm used to it," he said. "But I accept the fact that miracles are real and do happen."

There are times when we might take things granted. The sun rises in the east every morning, water flows from the faucet, and the lights come on when we flip the switch. But, people don't always stop when you are stuck on the side of the road. Sometimes, we are too busy to get involved with other people's stuff.

My friend also told me there have been so many people who have helped him in life he is obligated to help others. He said he takes nothing for granted. His was a good reminder to pay attention to the details of nature and the kindness of people. Ultimately, it is God's love for us that brings the caring soul and gentle touch when we desperately need it.

We may never know how important we are to someone. Sometimes it is when we are stuck, or a drought strikes, and there is a power outage that we begin to realize just how precious life truly is; and how important it is to be and to have a friend. Jesus Christ is that to me. Jesus wants us to stop, help, and be with people when they need us. We never know when we might be that person on the side of the road. Who will stop for us?