

Reflections of a New Member

By Jeff Stilwell

Long an admirer of theologians Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, there was a certain amount of expectation as I attended my first UCC church. What would I find inside, I wondered?

The last year had found me thinking more and more often about finding a church community with whom to grow. Why? Tired, I guess. Tired of not being able to talk about God's love in my life without being labeled an intolerant red-neck. Tired of watching nervous tics develop as I mention the word "Christian" in mixed company. Or, perhaps most importantly of all, tired of sitting on the sidelines as the Gospel is high-jacked by power-drunk merchants of polarization and fear.

I used to drive by Broadview Community United Church of Christ on my way to and from work each day, admiring the building, wondering about that striking banner with the big comma. Always admiring, but never stopping. Always wondering, but never stopping. One day, however, I noticed that Reverend Dan Stern - a man I remembered meeting briefly years ago - was the church's minister. On that day, I decided to stop and see if there was a worship service bulletin outside the building. There was. And in it I found Pastor Dan's prayer language "Creator, Father, Mother..."

"Could it be?" I wondered. "Does he really read Scripture the way I do?"

However, experience has taught that a minister - no matter how charismatic - does not a congregation make. What would I find inside, I wondered?

What did I find? I found this splendid blend. Really. In the newcomers class, a popular topic among us is what of this church appeals to each most. For me, it's the thoughtful and daring honesty of the Adult Spirituality classes on Sunday mornings. Then, too, it's the rich mix of fervent spirituality and enlightened political awareness suffusing the worship. The strong lay leadership, too, I find impressive, as I do the genuinely friendly conversations during coffee hour.

Even though my time here has been short, I can already sense one new truth of my life: I'm glad that I finally did stop wondering and, instead, stopped by.