

## FIRST AND CENTER

### Pastor's Blog

October 23, 2018

Next week is Halloween, perhaps the most bizarre holiday of them all. Many years ago, my husband and I hosted a Swedish Exchange Student for a year. When Halloween came around, a holiday they do not celebrate in Sweden, we explained what would happen. His reply: "Let me get this straight. Children you do not know, dressed in scary outfits, ring your doorbell and ask you to give them candy, and you give it to them?" Yes, that's it in a nutshell!



This year, I plan to be generous on Halloween (yes, even to those teenagers who come by having hardly bothered with a costume), because this practice is one of a dwindling number of times in our society that we celebrate welcoming the stranger.

Our neighborhood in Hamden is renowned for big Halloween: decorations, handouts, etc. People come with their kids from New Haven and North Haven, as well as other parts of Hamden. Last year, we had over 300 visitors! In some neighborhoods, people would be upset about folk from other towns coming, but I love Spring Glen because we utterly welcome them, prepare for them, and rejoice in each creative costume and tired adult chaperone! On this one night, we practice hospitality without question or judgment. People of all races and nationalities, people of all socio-economic levels come to our homes and are greeted warmly. Many houses have teal pumpkins to provide hospitality to those with dietary limitations. We don't question their gender identity, sexual orientation, citizenship status, religious affiliation, country of origin, or their grades in school. We laugh at the silly costumes and feign fear at the scary ones (anyone in a Star Wars-themed costume gets extra stuff at our house), and have a great time. I'll be going back to Hamden that night instead of staying in Hartford; I wouldn't miss it for the world.

Ironically, on a night that celebrates the scary, we in Spring Glen are not afraid of each other, or of the others we don't know who come to our homes. Trust prevails. Generosity abounds. We refuse to be afraid of differences; rather, we celebrate them.

I wish it was Halloween everywhere, every day of every year.

~ Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,  
Transitional Minister