

**NORTHFIELD: TRINITARIAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**



STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

The Rev. Rosemary Dawson in the Trinitarian Congregational Church in Northfield.

# A deep dive into Halloween

**By THE REV. ROSEMARY DAWSON**

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Most folks have fond memories of “all hallows eve” but few of us know much about its roots. So, for a bit of fun today I intend to dig into the story of Halloween. At the heart of Christianity is the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, and it is

foundational to our understanding of death and eternal life. While the church joyfully celebrates Easter, it also gives days to considering our own deaths and remembering those who have gone before us, thus we have All Saints Day (Nov. 1) and All Souls Day (Nov. 2). Often in ancient times the Church began its festival days with a vigil the night before and thus Halloween (All Hallows Eve) became established.

Many of our celebrations of Halloween are adaptations from other faith traditions. In Celtic Britain, the feast of Samhain marked the end of summer and the beginning of winter. This time of year was not just used for harvest and “wintering by” foods, it was also associated with death. The Celts believed that on the night of Oct. 31, the spirits of the dead walked abroad and were judged by the lord of darkness. They lit bonfires to

ward off the darkness, and the souls of the dead were invited into the light of the family hearth to share the warmth and the fruits of the harvest. This welcoming with food evolved into “trick or treat,” as did the ghoulish costumes that were meant to confuse the spirits. Behind the gifting of food and the welcoming of souls is the reminder to practice a gracious and warm hospitality to all people.

Also from the feast of Samhain came the tradition of bobbing for apples. Apples were used for divination, particularly when it came to love. Young people would try to bite into an apple floating in a tub of water or hanging from a string. The first person to succeed would be the next person to marry.

Another interesting connection comes from the tradition of “souling.” Beggars would go from house to house asking for food (a “soul cake”) in return for saying a prayer for the departed members of a family. The story goes that one cook, aware that many beggars were more interested in food than in prayer, decided to cut a hole in the middle of her soul cake dough and drop it into hot fat, thus inventing the doughnut. The circular form of the doughnut is a reminder of the endless circle of eternal life and of our duty to pray for the souls of the departed.



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MATT BURKHARTT

The Northfield Trinitarian Congregational Church.

**About the church**

The Trinitarian Congregation Church (United Church of Christ) will meet outside on Sunday, Oct. 31, at 10 a.m., outside of Fellowship Hall. In case of bad weather, the service will be held in Fellowship Hall. Services will be returning to the sanctuary beginning on Sunday, Nov. 7, at 10 a.m. In keeping with COVID-19 guidelines, the service will be abbreviated and masking, social distancing and other recommendation will be honored. Other activities, including the Hollyberry Fair (Nov. 6) and Community Meals, will be held at the church, as feasible. For more information, please contact the church office at 413-498-5839.

The Jack-o'-lantern, another Halloween favorite, has its origins in a tale about an old miser named Jack. He was not good enough to get into heaven, but found a way to stay out of hell by encircling the devil with crosses. In a bargain to be released, the devil promised to leave Jack alone forever. When Jack died, he was banned from heaven because of his wickedness, but because of their bargain the devil could not bring him to hell. So, Jack was condemned to wander the earth forever. The devil gave him a burning coal to light his way and Jack put it into a hollowed-out turnip as a lantern. In America, the turnip be-

came a pumpkin and Jack-o'-lanterns carved with frightening faces are meant to be reminders of the fate of those who cut themselves off from God.

These are a few of the fascinating roots of Halloween and its incorporation into a living faith that honors all people's spiritual expressions. And so, I leave you with a time-honored prayer for the day:

“From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggedie beasties,

“and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us.”

—from an old Scottish litany