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## From the Clergy Associate

### Dust

*Dust is all God has ever needed to make life: the quantum dust from which the stars arose, the dust by which the primal elements were sown, the earth dust from which the rocks were made, and the rock dust on which the first creatures grew.<sup>1</sup>*

I remember when I had to be out-and-about as a girl after “receiving ashes” on Ash Wednesday and feeling a bit uncomfortable around my peers who didn’t have black ashy smudges on their foreheads. “Ash Wednesday...it’s all about the ashes... it’s all about *dust*...” I once heard a grown-up remark, and I still wonder what lay behind that comment. I don’t think I would go *that* far, but being told by someone, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” as he or she imposes a cross on your forehead with thick, gritty ashes *is* quite powerful. The symbolism of this act can mean different things for each of us: a reminder of mortality, a reminder of the importance of repenting and turning back to God, a reminder of the cross that is made on our foreheads with chrism at our baptism or in a healing service, or a reminder of our commonality—our bodies have all come into this world in birth and will all pass away from this world in death.

As Barbara Brown Taylor explores in her essays on science and religion in her book *The Luminous Web*, some astrophysicists have identified core elements that are found in living matter as those coming from the creation of the cosmos—as those coming from the ashes of stars. Chemically speaking, she reflects, the only difference then between us and a tree or a rock or a chicken would be the way in which our elements are arranged. And I don’t see exploring creation theories from astrophysicists *and* the creation stories in Genesis as mutually exclusive. “Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” (Genesis 2:7) Yes, in one way or another, God *has* formed us from the dust of the ground, and *has* breathed into us the breath of life.

Each of us is part of a whole so much greater than ourselves. And with this awareness comes a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the whole, but also *hope*. As we enter this holy season of Lent

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<sup>1</sup> *The Luminous Web: Essays on Science and Religion*, Barbara Brown Taylor, 2000, p. 44.

on Ash Wednesday and we hear that we are dust, and to dust we shall return, may we also remember that God has always been able to create beautiful, wonderful, miraculous forms of *life* from this dust. Even in those parts of our lives which may seem to have disintegrated into nothing *but dust*, God can still form something beautiful from this dust and breathe into it the breath of new life.

The Rev. Joan F. Conley  
*Clergy Associate*