

**Alice Bigley Snow**  
**Parish Minister/Ministra de Parroquia**



1. **Getting to Know Alice/Aprendiendo a conocer a Alice**

Name/Nombre:	Alice Bigley Snow
A.B. Recipient/A.B. honor:	1979
Career/Profesión:	Parish Minister/Ministra de Parroquia
Span of Life/Duración de vida:	11-15-1911 to 11-17-1998
Place of Birth/Lugar de nacimiento:	Winchester, MA
Color of Hair/Color de pelo:	Auburn/Castaño rojizo
Color of Eyes/Color de ojos:	Blue/Azul
Brothers or Sisters/Hermanos o hermanas:	One brother/Un hermano
Hobbies/Pasatiempos:	The joyful habit of making friends; book talks, travel, reading and writing/La costumbre y la alegría de hacer amigos; charlas sobre libros; viajar; leer y escribir

*I believe that we can always learn and grow and that God opens doors forever, especially if with open minds, we season life with love and laughter. – Alice B. Snow*

## 2. Finding Voice<sup>1</sup>

Alice Bigley Snow was born and raised just outside of Boston. Her parents, George and Thenora Mitton Bigley, were active lay members of the First Baptist Church of Winchester, Massachusetts. Alice graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa with special honors from Smith College in 1932.

When asked how she happened to go to seminary and become a minister, Alice said:

I always wanted to but thought maybe that I couldn't. I was going to major in languages at Smith College. Then one day I was at a little chapel outside of town where some of us from the college held Sunday school on Sunday afternoons. The retired minister who volunteered there told me he was going to be away. He wanted me to preach for him the next Sunday night.

They kept asking me to preach again. They asked me to do more and more. That was what I really deep down wanted to do but didn't know if I could. It opened up the doors because I said yes to him that night. Smith College gave Andover Newton the money for a scholarship for me. I went right from college to seminary.

I was only 22 when I got my B.D. degree. They gave me a year of credit for work at Smith. In the English tutorial system, I did not have any classes for two years. I had individual work with the professors. I also skipped the second grade because I was cleaning the blackboard most of the time. I'm not so sure I was bright, but I worked hard. I can work.

Then she began theological study at the seminary of the American Baptist Church. She earned a bachelor of divinity degree from Andover Newton Theological School. Graduating first in her class, she gave the commencement address. She was also the only woman in her class.

### 3. Early Ministry

Alice was ordained May 10, 1934, in Payson Park Congregational Church in Belmont, Massachusetts. The next month on June 7, she married Arthur J. Snow. Alice stayed at the nearby church where she had been student assistant and became assistant minister until Arthur graduated from Andover Newton the following year:



I had a good student church so I had a lot of experience. Both the minister at Payson Park and the Dean of the Seminary encouraged me to be ordained in the Congregational Church even though I had entered seminary as an American Baptist. My husband had always been Congregational.

Alice and Arthur met at Andover Newton in the library. He was a student and worked in the library:

I kept getting all kinds of books. Any time I'd breathe about a book, he would be right there with it. I was going with somebody else part of the time, but he just saw to it there wasn't any time to go with anyone else. He was great. We had a happy marriage.

"Always on the growing edge intellectually and spiritually," Alice was quoted later, "Arthur continually encouraged me to experience similar growth in my own way."<sup>2</sup>

Designations as part-time minister or assistant to the minister at best were the titles for ordained women of that day. Most women ordained in 1934 still served in specialized ministries, worked in missions or simply married a minister.

For the next three years, Alice served First Congregational Church in Kensington, New Hampshire, as part-time minister. In 1936, she became the first clergy woman to give the invocation at the New Hampshire Legislature.

Out of 5,609 Congregational ministers in 1930, 131 were ordained clergywomen. By 1940, eight years after the Congregational Christian merger, the count of Congregational Christian clergywomen was 184, or 3.1 percent of clergy.<sup>3</sup>

Alice then reserved the next decade for her family. She and Arthur parented two boys: George Arthur Snow, who would later give his daughter his mother's name, and John Robinson Snow.

John has retired from his position as a Supervising U.S. Probation Officer for the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois and is actively involved in social work in Traverse City, Michigan. George was a teacher and school administrator and now manages his real estate investments in Detroit, Michigan.

From 1950 to 1966, Alice held several interim positions in Montvale, MA; Rockford, IL; and Beloit, WI.

#### 4. The Right Choice: Christ Congregational Church

On March 22, 1966, Alice's husband was killed in a car accident in Beloit. Later, she would write, "Arthur and I had thirty-two wonderful years in New Hampshire, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Florida, and Wisconsin."<sup>4</sup>

At age 55 and as both sons began their careers, Alice resumed her ministry. On September 1, 1966, she became the minister of a small, rural church in Clintonville, Wisconsin.

Moving after her husband's death was not easy:

After Arthur was killed, I had my choice of about four places. I was interim minister in my husband's church after he died. I took a month off. They wanted me to stay at Second Congregational Church in Beloit, but I did not want to do anything that would spoil what he had done. I thought it was better that I go on my own. I could have gone to two other Wisconsin churches. I could have had a position in New York City, but I wasn't ready emotionally to go there.

I liked the people at Clintonville. The parsonage was a lovely house. It was just what I needed at that time. I made the right choice.

While at Christ Church, Alice was selected 1970 Wisconsin Mother of the Year and Christ Church delighted her with a recognition service. In 1969, when she celebrated the thirty-fifth anniversary of her ordination, the church again honored her with a service of appreciation.

#### 5. "Go-Go, Girl"

A retired seminary classmate living in Phoenix told the minister of Southwest Conference that "if they knew what they were doing, they would look me up," Alice said.

When they called up, I told them I was happy where I was. I was up in years when they called me. I said, "I'm a woman. I'm over twenty." He said, "We didn't think of those things. We called you because of your record and what we saw." I appreciated that.

So at age 62, Alice began an eleven year ministry at Sedona, Arizona. From 1973 to 1984, she served the Church of the Red Rocks, United Church of Christ. When she arrived in Sedona, church membership was 266. By July of 1979, the congregation had burgeoned to nearly 500 members. When she retired, membership was 697.

"This was an exciting experience in a growing community," Alice said.

In Sedona, as in Clintonville, Alice had the habit of traveling great distances to comfort people who experienced accidents and loss. "I knew what it was like," she said. "I always sat out a surgery with the family. Sometimes it took a long time. I put on a lot of miles."

"Church members had highest praise for Alice Snow's pastoral caring. Alice was always out calling on people. I called her the 'go-go-girl,'" said an Arizona colleague, the Rev. Robert Carlson. "Members said that she was always there for their needs. She made her car a second home."

"Or her horse," said Patty Fox, a church member. "Everyone did seem to love Alice."

Patty and Calvin Fox, now in their 80s, were among the twelve couples who started the church in 1960. "Alice came at a time the church needed some healing," she said. "The theme of most sermons was about loving thy neighbor and getting along with everybody. Alice was a gracious, easygoing person. She always seemed to be in command of things."

In 1979, while at the Church of the Red Rocks, Alice became the sixth recipient of the Antoinette Brown Award for excellence and pioneering in ministry. According to the news release from the United Church of Christ, a former parishioner had said, "It is difficult to be honest about Reverend Snow and still be believable." Her nominators often praised her preaching and counseling which reflected her deep spiritual reservoir and pastoral instincts.

About her own ministry, Alice was quoted as saying, "We're all God's family, and each person is a special somebody."

Alice and the Rev. Dr. Dosia Carlson,<sup>5</sup> another Antoinette Brown Award recipient, became friends. Dosia enjoyed the hundred-mile drive up from Phoenix.

One Advent day in 1976, while viewing the towering crimson rock formations of Sedona from Alice's porch, Dosia was inspired to compose a hymn. As she watched, she said, "A splendid variety of red rock formations changing coloration as shadows moved from sunrise to sunset brought a sense of aliveness, a feeling of expectancy."

Words and music for her hymn, "All Earth is Waiting,"<sup>6</sup> came almost simultaneously. "I first played this music on a small electronic organ in Alice Snow's living room," Dosia said. "Even now, as I recall the origin of this hymn, I am filled with a sense of grandeur associated with spectacular setting and with the ageless news that Christ is coming."

Such was the environment that surrounded Alice Snow in the Arizona chapter of her ministry. Upon her retirement in 1984, the Church of the Red Rocks honored her with *Minister Emerita*<sup>7</sup> standing.

## 6. Pilgrim Place

That same year on April 2, Alice took residence at Pilgrim Place. Preparing for life in the retirement community where ministry to and with the community continues lifelong, Alice wrote that she anticipated continuing her "joyful habit of making friends."

For ten years, she had been on the long waiting list at Pilgrim Place.

Finally, two years before the then age cutoff of 75, she entered. When she went to Pilgrim Place, the church at Sedona gave a substantial gift to Pilgrim Place to spend on renovating her house, making it her home.

At Pilgrim Place, she was active in the volunteer chaplaincy program at the Health Services Center. She is remembered in the community as being an active, independent person. Among her other interests were "book talks, travel, reading and writing (a little in the past and hopes for more in the future)."



## 7. Wider Ministries

Alice Snow always wanted to be where decision-making happens. She gave years of energy and service to the wider church and community. She served on the YWCA Board of Directors in Minneapolis and in Wisconsin. In Cottonwood, Arizona, she had a leadership position in the Hospital Chaplaincy Program.

Nationally in the church, she was twice a delegate to General Synod. She was a member of the nominating committee of the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches. She was an active member of the Board of Directors of the United Church of Christ's Board for World Ministries.

In New Hampshire, she chaired a conference committee and served as a member of the Board of Directors. She was Vice Moderator of the conference. In Wisconsin, she was Moderator of the conference and a member both of the Board of Directors and of the Lay Life and Work Commission.

She continued service as a member of the Board of Directors of the Southwest Conference. There she also chaired the Committee on Ministry and the Nominating Committee. She was Chaplain for the Conference at Annual Meeting.

On November 17, 1998, two days after her 87th birthday, Alice died in the Health Services Center at Pilgrim Place. Following her memorial service in Kingman Chapel of the Claremont United Church of Christ, she was buried in Peabody, Massachusetts next to her husband.

## 8. What About You?

- Think about the path of Alice Snow's life. She chose to take time out from developing a full time career to grow a family.

***What is your present opinion about the "when and how" of career and family responsibilities? How has your thinking about your life work changed and evolved? What do you see as the risks/benefits of postponing either career or parenting? What are the difficulties of doing both at once?***

***Write about the personal integrity of honoring your life goals, your gifts, and your physical and spiritual energy.***

- Alice Snow felt encouragement from her husband to continue growing intellectually and spiritually.

***How might you think that support helped her after his death?***

***Write about those echoes from people who have supported you and whose words you carry with you. What do you "hear" to gain and regain courage during times that it would be easy to let it all go?***

- Although losing her life mate in a sudden and violent way was a tragedy in her life, Alice Snow found strength to move forward with her career. Her loss gave her understanding and compassion for others in a similar situation.

***What impressed you about how Alice used this life accident as an asset and tool in her ministry?***

***What do you think makes it easier for someone to talk honestly with someone who has shared a similar experience? Or does it make it more difficult?***

***What are your thoughts about important things, small or great, that have happened in your life – a disability, a disappointment, a loss – that have made a difference in how you relate to other people?***

***What do you know already about yourself regarding what you do when you meet a crossroad and must make a decision that will influence the direction of your life?***

***Is it possible to separate life from work?***

## 9. Church Family Project

Arrange for a time that young women of your age can visit a women's group in your church. Invite a discussion about "Crossroads."

Alice Snow's life and ministry were a series of crossroads decisions, right decisions for her.

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<sup>1</sup> The author is indebted to the Rev. Gail Irwin for a recorded interview at Pilgrim Place with the Rev. Alice Snow, Claremont, California, Summer, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in obituary by the *Claremont Courier*, November 22, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Brown Zikmund in "Women's Ministries within the United Church of Christ" in Catherine Wessinger. *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996)

<sup>4</sup> From "Book of Remembrances" Courtesy of Janet Cromwell, Director of Admissions at Pilgrim Place, Claremont, California.

<sup>5</sup> See "Dosia Carlson: A Christian, An Alleluia" at [www.ucc.org/html.  
www.ucc.org/women/finding.org](http://www.ucc.org/html.www.ucc.org/women/finding.org)

<sup>6</sup> "All Earth is Waiting" (#21, *God's Glory* published by The Church of the Beatitudes. Phoenix AZ)

<sup>7</sup> Retired but retaining an honorary title corresponding to that held immediately before retirement: *a professor emeritus*. (*American Heritage Talking Dictionary*).

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Dallas (Dee) A. Brauninger. *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice*, October, 2008