

Pastor Alice

Lin Marshall Brummels

I searched for God in the Church
of Christ, at a Methodist summer camp,
and briefly at a Missouri Synod

Lutheran church where I married,
in my quest for a spiritual home,
hitting dead ends like a homing pigeon

without a sense of direction.
I like the idea of congregating
with my neighbors in prayer,

but faith is a deer jumping
over the pasture fence, glimpsed
but elusive. Methodist Churches

change vicars like most of us change
our socks, fill-in with volunteers
between ordained pastors. Last year

a lay minister's Palm Sunday
sermon blasted Islamic terrorists,
blaming them for abducting children,

selling women, and mass murder.
He said a prayer against beheading,
same-sex marriage and abortion,

and one to save persecuted Christians.
After that, I wanted to hear a new voice
that wasn't wrapped in a blanket of hate.

Newly ordained Pastor Alice
arrives in summer, introduces
herself to the Caucasian congregation,

hair tied in a loose ponytail
of red-streaked-black curls,
setting off her grey clerical gown.

Her Kenyan accent emphasizes
her story of meeting Christ
when she was twelve,

finding him to be a father
to replace her absent earthly dad
still solidly rooted in the Muslim

religion of their homeland.
She assures her Methodist flock
that Mohammed's followers

are peace-loving people, well,
except for a few extremists,
but she wants only to tell her tale

of conversion, of how she beseeched
her dying brother to accept Jesus
before he passed on. She knows

she'll see him in Heaven someday.
She met her husband at a sacred rally.
Even her father went to their wedding,

first Christian marriage in their village.
Alice persisted to evangelize her sisters
and brothers. Even aunts and uncles

are now ministers too. She believes
in the power of prayer. However,
this white congregation doesn't believe

in Alice. Attendance drops as weeks pass
like a waterhole drying up in a drought.
As hard as she tries, her biblical sermons

don't connect with hard-headed farmers
who didn't study history and rarely travel
beyond Cancun resorts. They stay home

and plead for rain, parochial interests
trumping tolerance, and soon Alice
moves on to shepherd a new flock.

I find God in my garden, avoid most
organized religion, pray to Mother Nature
for the planet's survival.