

Beliefs

INSPIRATIONAL MESSAGES FROM LOCAL CLERGY



Submitted Photo

Janet Ault is a resident at Great Vow Zen Monastery.

Open doors, open minds

By JANET AULT

Special to The Daily Astorian

Setting foot in the bright halls and tranquil gardens of Great Vow Zen Monastery in Clatskanie, you may feel a little more pep in your step.

From the serene stone Buddhas to the smiling troupe of light-footed residents, it's clear that friendly spirits dwell here. Peace rests upon this place. And you can sense the countless lives whose devoted effort made it so.

Ordained and lay practitioners rise before dawn to sit long meditation and again from dusk to dark. They chant with reverent gusto, perform an ancient meal ritual of gratitude. Residents wear simple smocks, scour and maintain the temple grounds with elbow grease, and prepare basic vegetarian meals. They engage in group and private studies with the teachers.

Co-abbots Chozen Bays, Roshi and Hogen Bays, Roshi vow to be open to those in need. The monastery hosts a Sunday public service with meditation and dharma talks as well as weekend retreats such as mindful eating, the inner critic, and an introduction to Zen practice. One week a month they drop everything extra to focus on sesshin, an intensive meditation retreat to realign the compass of practice.

Monastics renounce certain pleasures to investigate the mind's nature and practice harmonious service. Through collective power, they face discomfort and hang-ups head-on to cultivate the helpful, dismantle the harmful, and probe: What is existence and this thing I call myself? For, they believe, only by challenging fixed views can we begin to realize our potential for change.

Janet Ault is a resident at the Great Vow Zen Monastery in Clatskanie.



Thibault Camus/AP Photo

France's Interior minister Bernard Cazeneuve spoke during a debate on secularism in schools at Jean Zay college in Paris Wednesday. The school door and the cafeteria menu are the new front lines in the anguished debate over religion in France, where children in one Paris suburb this week were denied alternatives to pork in the name of secularism.

After attacks, France walks narrow line on Islam in schools

Pork, or nothing, for students

By LORI HINNANT
Associated Press

PARIS — This was the week that schoolchildren in one Paris suburb got a stark choice at the cafeteria: pork or nothing at all.

Chilly-Mazarin joined a handful of towns run by right-leaning mayors which have ended a practice of offering a substitute for students forbidden by their religion from eating pork.

The decisions have come amid increased discussions in France about its secularist ideals following the terror attacks in January that were blamed on French Islamic extremists — a discussion critics say has been hijacked by anti-Muslim forces on the far right.

On Wednesday, the Socialist government issued unusually direct criticism against the schools that have ended the pork substitutes as it was training dozens of appointees to mediate tense questions about the role of religion in schools and in public life.

Increasingly narrow line

In back-to-back speeches, the education and interior ministers walked the country's increasingly narrow line on religion in schools, with the unspoken threat of Islamic extremism hovering over the auditorium in Paris' tony 16th arrondissement.

Education Minister Najat Val-



Thibault Camus/AP Photo

France's Interior minister Bernard Cazeneuve shakes hands with a woman working at Jean Zay college prior to attending a debate Wednesday.

laud-Belkacem said teachers at schools have to impart the secularist ideal, but "not a secularism that is a declaration of war against a religion, as we see when a mayor here or there decides that in the name of a so-called secular ideal, children will be forced to eat pork or skip school lunch."

France forbids "ostentatious" symbols of religion in schools and government buildings, a mandate generally interpreted to mean Muslim head scarves and one that includes parents who accompany school outings wearing them. Schools take seriously their mission to educate the next generation of secular French citizens, never more so than since the January terror attacks.

Vallaud-Belkacem alluded to that mission repeatedly in her speech to the mediators, whose

job is to offer advice to local governments and schools about France's much-vaunted division between church and state.

"School is a place of knowledge, not of belief. This distinction is essential and we have to repeat it and teach it without cease," said Vallaud-Belkacem, who was born in Morocco and raised as a Muslim. Schools need to take responsibility for spotting and countering extremism, she said.

Little economic power, even less hope

But some say that what France defines as a religious problem actually leads to discrimination of a minority population that has little economic power and even less hope of advancement.

"The terror attacks of January 2015 weigh heavily on the

way the problem is defined," said Olivier Noel, a sociologist who studies discrimination in France. "When you are talking about misusing the secular ideal, on the one hand it's happening on the extreme right, with Islamophobia. Then you have the extreme secularism of the left. And without meaning to, they join the positions of the extreme right."

Vallaud-Belkacem and Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve drew the line at public figures they accused of using attacks on religion to score political points.

Vincent Berton is the secular mediator for the Marseille area, a Mediterranean crossroads where religions have mixed for hundreds of years. But even there, he said, "you find the same questions pretty much everywhere" scarves, school meals, prayers.

The issues are not clear cut. Although a group of intellectuals floated the idea of vegetarian meals as a secular alternative, the concept of meatless lunches has yet to take hold. But in Chilly-Mazarin, for example, the school cafeteria menus for November and December show only four days when pork is the only main dish offered. And in the Burgundy town of Chalon-Sur-Saone, an administrative panel rejected an emergency request to keep the substitutes, ruling that only two of 50 meals until the end of the year contained pork.

The tribunal said the hard decision whether the town's decision was an attack on freedom of religion will be made within three months by a higher judge.



9-1-WHAT?

THE BEST OF THE WORST CALLS TO ASTORIA 911 DISPATCH

Trick, definitely, trick

The runup to Halloween brought out the drunk and the weird to emergency dispatch.

Like the extremely intoxicated dude in Warrenton who greeted trick-or-treaters in the nude. Trick, definitely, trick.

And then there was the stolen fruit. And the teenagers charging elk that were bedding down. Some free advice: Elk don't forget.

Follow reporter Kyle Spurr on his 9-1-What? Twitter watch, where a few of the sometimes head-scratching calls to area dispatch take center stage. The full feed is at www.twitter.com/9_1_WHAT.

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT? Following

{10/31 @ 5:57 p.m.} Extremely intoxicated man answering the door nude to trick or treaters. #Warrenton

10:11 AM - 2 Nov 2015

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT? Following

{10/16 @ 2:13 p.m.} Caller requested assistance regarding stolen fruit. #Astoria

10:11 AM - 2 Nov 2015

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT? Following

{10/17 @ 4:45 p.m.} Two boys were shoving and kicking a vending machine. #Astoria

10:11 AM - 2 Nov 2015

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT? Following

{10/17 @ 1:46 p.m.} A group of teenage boys charged at about 40 elk that were bedding down. #Gearhart

9:46 AM - 28 Oct 2015

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT? Following

{10/18 @ 7:50 p.m.} While children were playing outside, someone was pointing lasers at them. #Warrenton

9:48 AM - 28 Oct 2015

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT? Following

{10/17 @ 4:45 p.m.} Two boys were shoving and kicking a vending machine. #Astoria

10:11 AM - 2 Nov 2015

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