

## Looking Back...Looking Ahead

We've had a very full service today—with lots of good content—and I just have a few thoughts to share as we wrap it up.

I'd thought about calling these remarks "Not a Farewell Address." But that would belabor what all of us (I assume by now) already know, which is that our interim period is to be extended by another year. So let me just add a few things:

I'm gratified by the confidence and trust you have shown in me to continue on with our shared interim ministry; for that is what it is. As I've said on other occasions, ministry is not something a minister does to a congregation; rather it is what happens in the interplay between the minister and the congregation he or she serves. On this note, I feel blessed by the interplay we have had over the past two years.

During my time in the ministry I have really come to appreciate the words of Rev. David Rankin, as shown in your Order of Service today: "I have learned that the most important item in the religious community is the people of the religious community." As simple and self-evident as that sounds, it proves to be a very profound statement when it gets put on the ground and played out. I have witnessed its truth in more ways that I can even recall now at this point in my life in the ministry.

I have certainly witnessed it here over the past two years. I would characterize much of our first year together here as a time of re-grouping. While you were not a divided congregation in the sense of any kind of a schism, there were some highly mixed, and strongly held, feelings about the ministry that had concluded prior to my arrival. There is no need to revisit that now, except for me to say that I valued your willingness to spend time with each other—in some of the structured settings the Deacons, Transition Team, and I were able to provide—in order to process those feelings. It needed to be done, and it was done in the spirit of bringing a greater level of wholeness to this religious community. The most important item in the religious community is indeed the people of the religious community, and you have affirmed and confirmed that.

Building on those experiences we spent some of this past year renewing your commitment to your Covenant of Right Relations with the practicum sessions that were held. We'll be continuing with them in our third year. Keep tuned—and my thanks to those who led those sessions and those who participated.

Thanks to the work of your governance task force a very good review has been done as to how you govern yourselves as a free religious congregation. I appreciate all the effort that went in that process. Now we have another year to begin the implementation of some of their suggestions.

Your Multicultural Ministries Committee continues to do an outstanding job of keeping us abreast of matters we need to be attending to as we seek to fulfill our Second UU Principles of “justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.” I was especially grateful for the ways we were able to work together for the service and teach-in back on May 7 as requested by the Black Lives UU group within our UU Association. There is much more to do in the area, and we will attend to it.

I know there was disappointment when you were not able to settle a minister this year—particularly in light of the tremendous work done by your Search Team. But I know I share with you our deepest confidence in them as they take up their task again come fall—with our continued support and encouragement. You have much to offer a prospective settled minister here—and I will certainly play whatever appropriate role I can in bringing that person here.

I'm going to finish up by going back to the reading from which I've taken Rev. Rankin's words today. They came at the end of a series of vignettes he wrote about his time in the UU ministry after he had retired. Here's a little more of what he said:

“I have learned that the real church can be defined as our most intimate relationships:

How we smile and trust each other;

How we talk and touch each other;

How we share and protect each other;

How we welcome new friends and forgive old enemies;

How we love each other—in all the myriad ways that love can be expressed.

That is the church.”

That indeed is the religious community at its best however it is named.

I've seen that ways in which you live out the words Dave Rankin offers during my time with you—and I've shared that with prospective ministers for this congregation. I will continue to do so.

And I look forward to another year together in our promising, challenging, hopeful, and blessed time of transition.

When I spoke about our Universalist story last week I noted that the union of our two parent denominations—the Universalists and the Unitarians—took place in 1961. At the service and ceremony that was held in Boston to celebrate that union a special hymn was written for the occasion; and its words transcend the event for which it was originally written. They still speak to who we are and who we aspire to be today as a liberal religious movement. As we think ahead to our upcoming year together, let us hear well their words as we now sing them together.

Stephen Edington  
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