

**"The Practice of Shared Ministry"©**  
**Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, Woodbury, CT**  
**The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, Minister**  
**May 31, 2009**

*Central to our covenant to one another as Unitarian Universalists is that we promise to one another our mutual trust and support. This promise recognizes the relationship of congregation to congregation and, within each congregation, from congregant to congregant.*

*~ Beverly Sadowick Smrha, District Consultant, Pacific Central District*

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO GATHER**

Come, Come Whoever You Are, #188

READING: Come, come, whoever you are;  
Man, woman, parent, child  
Whatever your religious journey,  
Whatever your skin color,  
Whatever your ability,  
Whomever you love-  
You are welcome here this morning.  
You are welcome at our table.  
You are welcome in this religious home.

Good Morning! Welcome to the Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, or more affectionately known as MUUS. I am the Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, and it is my great pleasure and privilege to serve this congregation. We welcome all of you.

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

"Important parts of our community life are the invitations we give to one another for activities beyond our morning's service. Please note the announcements in your order of service.

- If you are a newcomer, and haven't yet signed our guest book in the entryway, please do so before you leave so that we may send you a newsletter listing our events. If you have questions about Unitarian Universalism or are thinking about joining this congregation, we invite you

- to join us for coffee/tea after our service today and to speak with me or a member of the Membership Committee who wear gold nametags.
- Later in the worship service newcomers will have an opportunity to introduce themselves, and we hope that you will do so. It is optional, but we would like to give you a proper welcome.
  - To parents, children are always welcome to stay in the service, or join the other children in our religious education classes.
  - This month a portion of our 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday collection will go to support the Boys to Men Mentoring Network of New England. At least three of our people are deeply involved in it, Dave Bolduc, John Cummings, and Kevin Byler. It is a wonderful extension of our ministry in the larger world. Please plan on making a large donation toward this cause today.
  - The flowers this morning are given in honor of Lizzie Ross who graduated from school yesterday. Please consider making an offering of flowers for this sanctuary for various Sundays throughout the year, in honor of a special event or in memory of a loved one. You can sign up at the back table.
  - If you like to have sweets to eat and coffee or tea . . . to drink after our services, please sign up at the back table.

If there are any other MUUS related announcements, we ask that you line up to my left to share them now and please use the microphone."

#### **MEMBER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

#### **NEW MEMBER WELCOME & COVENANT** *(see insert)*

#### **SUNDAY SERVICE OPENING**

And, now: "I invite everyone to relax your body, come into this natural space in beauty & light. Take the next few moments to focus on your breathing. Breathe deeply. Relax. We welcome you into this place made more sacred by your presence."

#### **SOUNDING OF BELL**

## CHALICE READING

These words from Gordon B. McKeeman<sup>1</sup>

We summon ourselves from the demands and delights of the daily round  
From the dirty dishes and unwaxed floors,  
From unmowed grass and untrimmed bushes,  
From all incompleteness and not-yet-startednesses,  
From the unholy and the unresolved.

We summon ourselves to attend to our vision  
Of peace and justice,  
Of cleanliness and health,  
Of delight and devotion,  
Of the lovely and the holy,  
Of who we are and what we can do.

We summon the power of tradition and the exhilaration of newness,  
The wisdom of the ages and the knowing of the very young.  
We summon beauty, eloquence, poetry, music to be the bearers of our dreams.

We would open our eyes,  
Our ears,  
Our minds,  
Our hearts,  
To the amplest dimensions of life.  
We rejoice in manifold promises and possibilities.

\* **HYMN #289**    *“Creative Love, Our Thanks We Give”*

\* **COVENANT** (in unison)  
*Love is the spirit of this society.  
Dwelling together in peace,  
Seeking truth,  
Helping one another,  
Serving human needs,*

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<sup>1</sup> Editor, Helen Pickett. **Rejoice Together. Prayers, meditations and other readings for family, individual and small group worship.** (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2006) 15-16.

*Honoring the Earth and all that is,  
This is our covenant.*

**\* SINGING THE CHILDREN ON THEIR WAY**

*As you go may joy surround you, as you go, go in peace;  
know our love is with you always, as you go, as you go.*

**OFFERTORY**

As we take our collection, we invite first time visitors to let the plate/basket pass them by, you are our guests today. Remember to include any extra donations you might have for the "Boys to Men" program in the white envelope in your Order of Service.

Let there be an offering to sustain and strengthen this place which is sacred to so many of us, a community of memory and of hope, for we are now the keepers of the dream.

~ Brandoch L. Lovely

**SHARING JOYS AND SORROWS\*\***

If you are visiting for the first time, or have come back after a long time, or if you are still getting to know us, we would love it if you would introduce yourself to us. It is purely optional, but we'd like to give you a proper welcome. Please raise your hand so we can bring you a mic.

***Let the congregation say, "Welcome!"***

As we begin the sharing of our joys and sorrows, please remember to tell us your name before sharing.

And, now, if you woke this morning with a sorrow so heavy that you need the help of this community to carry it; or if, in the spirit of thankfulness, you woke with gratitude in your heart that simply must be shared, now is the time for you to speak.

**JOYS & SORROWS**

May all that is shared at this time be seen as holy.  
May it be so.

## PRAYER AND MEDITATION

In Words

In Silence

In Song—Spirit of Life, #123

## SERMON *“The Practice of Shared Ministry”* Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

I wish you could have seen her, our very own President of this congregation, Tracy Johnson, on Friday evening. It was a wonder to behold, a milestone, a moment in time, when you watch someone reach a pivotal moment, where a dream is accomplished. A moment when who you will be, will never be quite the same as who you were before. It was my distinct privilege, in that moment to watch Tracy receive her hood and Master of Arts diploma in Spirituality from the assembled faculty and dignitaries of Hartford Seminary.

As I sat there in the cool afternoon, remembering my own days at Hartford Seminary 15 years ago, I remembered my own inexplicable call to community ministry. A ministry grounded in building community, justice work, action, and bringing congruence to my life such that every day (not just some days or Sundays) would be expression of a life grounded in the hope and ideals of Unitarian Universalism.

At Hartford Seminary, I would learn and come to know the word “praxis.” It fit well with my developing the sense of a call which was, oddly enough, not in pursuit of professional ordained ministry. It was simply a call to live my life, my ordinary life, in a way that was grounded in justice, humility, compassion, strength, and love. To do so in my work as an administrator at a human services agency, with my family and with strangers on the street, in kindness with my own soul. My first days at Hartford Seminary marked the beginning of many small steps toward this goal of an integrated life that I continue to this day.

P R A X I S. Not the word “practice” that is in the title of this sermon; but the word “praxis.” For me, the word “praxis” means more than “to just practice at something,” as I sometimes do when I practice at the piano. When used religiously, it means to develop a dedicated, lifelong discipline that one internalizes as a way of life. In so doing, that same discipline may shape one’s life in ways beyond what one might have anticipated. For example, I never anticipated that I would become a parish minister to a congregation. But, one’s praxis takes you in directions beyond your control and

expectations. It opens you up to new possibilities and emboldens one to seek ever expanding ways of practicing one’s religious principles in a variety of settings. It invites you, nudges you, woos you, and yes calls you to grow in spirit, generosity, and heart. It is not static, but always changing, and always calling one to do, to act in ways that align oneself with one’s own principles of faith.

In time, I came to realize that this drive toward living a faith in action, grounds my call to ministry. In time I would learn that only by acting and then reflecting on that action, could I, would I, did I grow. And, that in that growth, that spiritual growth, transformation comes. I came to see ministry as a way of life that brings health and healing to other people, within our congregations and in the larger world.

But, this was not simply some adventure that I made come true, by myself. In time, I learned that the shape of my life was not mine to shape alone. I came to realize how much others in my faith community would eagerly and steadfastly step forward to help me toward my dream of the integration of my faith within, and in my life. Visible, tangible Unitarian Universalist angels, who, on this earth, stepped forward to help me realize my dream of integrating my faith in to all aspects of my life, only because I asked them to help me do so.

I hadn’t known, when I started this life-altering journey that I would need to depend on others to accomplish that simple thing, of integrating my faith into all parts of my life. To be sure, this dream is not even yet fully realized, and never will be completely. But the important thing is that we need one another to reach for dreams of spiritual health and growth. I could not do it by myself. Whatever baby steps I accomplished from one day to another, was always, always, always dependent on people I did not yet know, and who did not yet know me. But, together, in relationship, in a shared ministry, we changed each other’s life, deepening our lives by our relationship with the other.

In the evolving, unpredictable but resolutely steadfast pursuit of this dream of the integration of faith values in my life with others who desired the same thing, I began to coincidentally realize how much Unitarian Universalism is grounded in the mutuality of our relationships to other. It was not a weakness to ask for help. It is a necessity that we ask one another for help. I came to realize that it is in our congregations, our covenantal communities, that we, its members, find others who help us to grow in spirit, wisdom and reason.

This is not something that happens just in caring moments or groups such as Small Group Ministries. It is something that, if we have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to share, can happen in our ministry to each other in every moment. It can happen:

- in our leader’s administration of the congregation (remember the root words of “to minister” in the word “administration”);
- in the spiritual development of leadership to guide the congregation into its future ministry;
- in Sunday Services and worship that inspires transformation;
- in religious education where, at any age, we can learn from each other;
- in social justice committees where we focus our love in the larger world;
- in sustaining and helping our members to integrate their own faith values in their daily lives;
- in growing this congregation so that others we do not yet know can have these same opportunities.

Here’s the secret. Whether you realize it or not (as certainly I did not for a very long time and whether you are tuned into the word “ministry” or not) the fullest and most enriching experience of Unitarian Universalism can only be experienced as a shared ministry. That is because a basic tenant of our faith is that no matter what our age, we are called to grow in spirit and faith. Our Unitarian Universalist heritage draws us into covenant with one another to support one another so that we may grow by and through our relationships with each other. It calls us to grow by asking us to stay in relationship when we have disagreements. It calls us to grow by the spiritual discipline of praxis, wherein we find ourselves spiritually transformed within and beyond who we are today.

This concept of shared ministry in congregations is new for some people. Not all understand it, nor do all think of their lives as a ministry. I am hoping that will change. Held within a Unitarian Universalist context, the concept of shared ministry can simply mean the practice of our faith with one another in ways that inspire health and wholeness. **The practice of our faith with one another in ways that inspire health and wholeness.** It means the ministry of caring for one another. It means the ministry of loving this congregation into health and wholeness. It can mean a new way of talking that inspires a new way of being with one another, and allows us to focus on a new spiritual discipline, new ways of praxis, new ways of acting, new ways of integrating our faith within ourselves and helping others do likewise.

PAUSE

I encourage shared ministry because without its presence in a congregation, congregations can easily get off course, lose perspective, and cease to grow. Failure to understand this basic principle of sharing the ministry, is precisely the place where so very many congregations go wrong, sometimes for decades. Those who don't "get it," see themselves as consumers, coming to be entertained and inspired, paying for an ordained minister to make these things happen for them. Expecting that because they pay a minister, the minister's job, by him or herself, is to fix whatever the problems are in the congregation, including growing the congregation in numbers. They see the ministry as only belonging to the minister, and the minister's job to minister unto them. In short, it becomes a spectator sport.

#### PAUSE

There is a story, well known to most ministers, that exemplifies type of ministry. It goes something like this:

After hundreds of years, the ideal model of the perfect pastor has finally created. She preaches exactly 20 minutes and then sits down. She condemns sin, but never hurts anyone's feelings. She works from 8am to 10pm, in every type of work, from preaching to custodial service.

He makes \$200 week, wears good clothes, buys good books regularly, has a nice family, drives a good car, and gives \$100 a week to the church. He also stands ready to contribute to every good work that comes along, both in time and money.

She is 26 years old and has been preaching for 30 years. She is tall and short, thin and heavy set, handsome and beautiful.

He has one brown eye and one blue; with hair that is parted in the middle, left side dark and straight, the right side brown and wavy. He has a burning desire to work with teenagers and spends all available time with older folks.

She smiles all the time with a straight face because s/he has a sense of humor that keeps one seriously dedicated to the work. She makes 15 calls a day on church members, spends all spare time recruiting new members, and is never out of the office.

The ideal model? I don't think so. That's not really what we want, is it? Oh maybe, deep down inside of us we want someone to take care of us in that way. But, we know

it's not healthy for us or for the congregation to perpetuate such a mis-conceived notion of ministry.

Don't tell anyone I said this, but from a community organizing point of view, aligning the broad concept of ministry too closely to the professional ministry is a mistake. To start off, I don't believe in giving any one person in a congregation that much power and authority. Recall that ours is a faith grounded in and deeply rooted in democratic principles. Ministers in our denomination are elected by the congregation, as are its lay leaders. Whatever authority we carry, comes directly from the congregation's authority to ordain and elect its leadership. This is a good thing. In so doing, we avoid charismatic personalities who place their own personal goals and ambitions, above the health and needs of the congregation. Moreover, when such ministers leave, they leave a hole in the congregation that is difficult to fill, because it never was a shared ministry. In this form of “spectator ministry” people are taught to be dependent on the professional ministry, and when they are gone the congregation falls into disarray. This is not a model that creates sustainable and healthy congregations. It puts too much emphasis on one person who regardless of their credentials, will never have all the answers. You will know when you've had a “good” minister working with you, because you will notice that when they leave, things don't fall apart. They will have helped you develop leadership, shared ministry and systems that will continue on after they have gone.

My goal, with you here, is to build a congregation that is held together: by a vision you develop in relationship with each other; by a covenant you develop to inform yourselves how you will choose to be with one another in good times and bad; by a shared ministry where each of you finds opportunities in relationship with others to live lives where your faith principles are integrated into the breadth and substance of your life.

To be sure, a shared ministry already exists in parts of this congregation. For example, my ministry with Denise Pedane, our Religious Education Director, is a shared ministry. Our shared focus on assisting each other in our ministries has created a momentum in this congregation that is self-evident. From my perspective, your religious education program is the crown jewel of this congregation. It shows in your welcome of children and families to the congregation; in the bonding that exists between our children; by the fact that some of them “make” their parents come on Sundays, and by their willingness to give up other events important to them, in order to come to their own Small Group Ministry on Friday nights. It is a result of many things, including the support of a well-functioning and good hearted RE Committee. And, it is also the result of a carefully crafted covenant that Denise and I have together, of which one of its most important points is “to strive for over communication” with one another.

Your religious education program for our children is but one of several shared ministries you can rightly take pride in. But, it is not yet a consistently held concept across the entire congregation. And, there remains the temptation to think, still, that it is the board's or the minister's job to hold everything together. It is not. It is our ministry together that will sustain this congregation through changes that otherwise would blow it off course during challenging times.

Later today, you will have an opportunity to review an organizational chart for this congregation that has been developed by the leadership of this congregation. It is grounded in a shared ministry model, designed to sustain the congregation no matter who the minister is, or what charismatic personalities come on the scene. It elevates the role of the Committee on Ministry to provide a check and balance in the system to make sure that the various ministries of the congregation are spiritually nurtured. It provides the board with some relief from having to keep track of all the ministries of the congregation, allowing the board to focus more deeply on the important ministries of fiscal health, leadership development, and personnel matters. It emboldens the Committee on Ministry to act as a process observer within the congregation to identify healthy ministries in the congregation, and to also step in to support those groups or individuals that may be having trouble. In the absence of a minister, it allows the congregation to continue to move forward, with the Committee on Ministry and the Board working together, to stabilize the congregation and support the various ministries of the congregation.

And, so, I encourage you.

I encourage you to think of your own life as a ministry focused on integrating your faith values into every aspect of your life, and on bringing health and wholeness to others in this congregation, and to others in the larger world.

I encourage you to discard any illusions that Unitarian Universalism is a “spectator sport” wherein it's the minister's job, by herself, to grow your spirit, other's, and to grow this congregation.

I encourage you to look for opportunities in every moment of your life to see your life as a blessing to this world.

I encourage you to see your contributions to various groups in this congregation, ranging from leadership opportunities to so-called committee work as ministries to one another, helping each other live out the praxis of Unitarian Universalism.

I encourage you to stand shoulder to shoulder with one another to make this congregation not only sustainable in hard times, but to help it and those in it grow in spirit and health.

I encourage you to live your faith three dimensionally, in every part of your life, so that at the end of your life you may say, "I lived by those principles most important to me with a people who did likewise; and together we made that life possible for the other."

May it be so.

### **OBJECT LESSON (Craft sticks)**

### **REFLECTION AND RESPONSE**

*John Cummings, Chair, Committee on Ministry*

\* **HYMN #298**    *"Wake Now My Senses" v. 1-5*

### **CLOSING READING**

*Rebecca Parker, President, Starr King School for the Ministry*

"Your gifts -- whatever you discover them to be -- can be used to bless or curse the world.

The mind's power, the strength of the hands, the reaches of the heart, the gift of speaking, listening, imagining, seeing, *waiting*

Any of these can serve to feed the hungry,  
bind up wounds,  
welcome the stranger,  
praise what is sacred,  
do the work of justice  
or offer love.

Any of these can draw down the prison door,  
hoard bread,  
abandon the poor,  
obscure what is holy,  
comply with injustice  
or withhold love.

You must answer this question:  
What will you do with your gifts?

***Choose to bless the world.***

The choice to bless the world  
can take you into solitude  
to search for the sources  
of power and grace;  
native wisdom, healing and liberation.

More, the choice will draw you into community,  
the endeavor shared,  
the heritage passed on,  
the companionship of struggle,  
the importance of keeping faith,  
the life of ritual and praise,  
the comfort of human friendship,  
the company of earth, its chorus of life welcoming you.

None of us alone can save the world.

*Together* -- that is another possibility, waiting.

**EXTINGUISHING OF THE CHALICE**

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again. Let the congregation say: AMEN!