

# Introduction

*“The world is too dangerous for anything but truth and too small for anything but love.”*

- William Sloane Coffin



This report is intended to be a follow up to the **“Inner and Outer Journeys - A Plan for Ministerial Renewal for the Reverend Allison Barrett”** that was written and shared with the congregation prior to my departure for a five month sabbatical in September 2007.

My sabbatical was self-directed and based on an Adult Learning Model that connects my insights and growth to our UU Purposes, Principles and Sources. It seeks to understand my learnings both as they relate to stated goals and to where my spirit traveled while on sabbatical.

Although some ministerial expenses are provided to me each year for ongoing professional development, the personal cost to me of my sabbatical was two to three times greater than my yearly professional expenses (which are intended to cover the costs of doing ministry year round during a normal working year.) I share this only to inform the Board and congregation so that they can think about the purpose and function of a “sabbatical fund” in the future.

Most of all, I am grateful for the opportunity to grow and change in ministry, grateful for a profession that recognizes this need, grateful for a congregation that continues to honour it and to step up to the plate of leadership, talent, caring and financial support when I am away growing in ministry hopefully for all our benefit! I am very appreciative of all that I gained and was given while on sabbatical.

Good Offices Training -  
Ministry Days  
General Assembly, Portland  
Oregon  
(June 18-21 2007)



Rev. Charles Eddis, Rev. Allison Barrett,  
Rev. Jane Bramadat, and Rev. Wayne  
Walder

*"In whatever they do the Good Offices persons will bear in mind the well-being of both the colleagues who ask for their help and the ministry itself." - from the Pacific Northwest District (PNWD) of the UUA guidelines on Good Offices Representatives."*

I am one of four Good Offices Representatives nominated and elected by my peers to serve my fellow ministers and their congregations in Canada; I serve the area with the greatest number of ministers. As well, the Central Region has undergone a tremendous amount of ministerial transition over the last few years and continues to do so, with the departures and retirements of settled ministers, the arrivals of interims and interns and the beginning of new ministries in London, Waterloo, Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, Durham and Peterborough. It has been a busy time, but I have and continue to deeply value this opportunity to serve my colleagues and their churches and ministries.

The Good Offices Representative is at one and the same time one who is called upon to "minister to ministers" in times of need, celebration and transition and to serve the greater denomination by helping to build, maintain and strengthen congregational health and wellness. Good

Officers are ministers to whom other ministers feel they can turn for guidance, support and advice, as well as a simple listening ear – and they are also ministers with specialized understanding and training in the relationship between healthy congregations and ministry who may be accessed by key lay leaders as well. I consider it a high honour to have been asked for the third year to remain one of Canada's Good Officers.

While I was on sabbatical, I continued to offer these services to several colleagues and congregations in transition and some in deep need of support. Without offering identifying details, it is safe to say that my work encompassed a ministry of hospitality and welcome to those coming from far away who may have felt isolated or under stress, a ministry of introduction and connection to those trying to find their way into a network of collegial support, a ministry of empathy, support and guidance to those encountering challenging institutional dynamics, a ministry of counsel to those preparing to leave or retire, a ministry of healing to those in grief or distress and a ministry of witness, presence and support to the congregations that these colleagues serve. While these ministries may also include emailing and phone calling, more often than not I have made the effort to meet colleagues or their congregations in need of Good Offices face to face, so this ministry does take time and often quite a lot of driving.

*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen  
Nobody knows my sorrow  
Nobody knows the trouble I've seen  
Glory Hallelujah*

However, knowing how 'alone at the centre' most ministers truly are, it is worth every minute and mile I can give to make sure they feel connected, understood, appreciated and valued – in good times as well as in challenging ones. I am also very aware of the very special stresses that congregations face when their ministers are in transition or in deep need and have been called to minister on my own to these congregations. I have learned a great deal about myself, about ministry and about congregational life in serving as a Good Offices Representative in ways that I believe will continue to benefit my own congregation.

As well, I attended the new in-depth two day Good Offices Training prior to Ministry Days at General Assembly in Portland Oregon. This training had been highly anticipated (indeed it was postponed for a year pending the new manual) and it was extremely helpful. More than thirty of us from across the continent gathered to share stories, advice, learning, experiences and successes as well as challenges in ministering to our

fellow ministers and their congregations.

Our training included presentations from experts in congregational wellness and health, small group work, plenary time, questions and answers and individual case studies and reflection. We focused on diagnostic, mediation, deep listening, advocacy, education, wellness, conflict resolution, management and community-building skills – all of which are essential to ministering well to a complex human community like a church. I have already gained good insight from the mediation, counseling and consultation work in which I have previously been engaged as a Good Offices person and feel that both the training and the actual work that encompass being a Good Officer are a valuable asset to my ministry with our church.

## **UU Values**

**The UU Principles I feel are most connected to my Good Offices work are Principles 2 and 3:**

- **Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;**
- **Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;**

But it is within in our overall Covenant as an “Association of Congregations” (a less quoted but equally important part of our congregational polity) that I feel this work is truly embedded. As the final sentence of our Purposes and Principles states:

“As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.”

My work as a Good Offices Representative lifts up this wider denominational circle of commitment, mutual trust and support to me on a regular basis, and grounds my faith, my ministry and my Calling to ‘Love the world’ no matter where I am.

North Central Ministry  
Development Center  
Assessment  
(July 8-10, 2007 - Ongoing  
Coaching)



## Introduction

As part of my own process of ongoing self-reflection and theological, spiritual and vocational insight, I decided to make a three day visit to the North Central Ministry Development Center in Minneapolis and to follow up with personal reflection and coaching afterward. Parts of this report are taken from my Sabbatical Plan, with the latter part focusing on what arose in coaching and reflection since that time.

The life of ministry is a complex interplay of personal, professional, vocational and spiritual experiences, aptitudes, goals and dreams - that are usually interwoven. Because of the “indefinite” nature of a call to settled ministry, it has always seemed to me that it is morally imperative for a minister to reflect deeply and regularly on both his or her overall ministerial vocation and on the specific nature of a particular call. While ongoing spiritual reflection is part of ministerial discipline and practice for most ministers, reflection on a much deeper level often helps to reveal deeper truths. Opportunity for this kind of theological and spiritual vocational reflection is often hard to find amid the deadlines and daily demands of parish ministry.

For this reason, some people and places that specialize in ministerial formation, assessment and reflection offer programs and opportunities for ministers to do this deeper work. Indeed, one of our present denominational requirements for being granted Fellowship is an initial assessment through an accredited centre for ministerial vocational assessment. While I entered the process before this requirement was made mandatory, I was intrigued by the idea and volunteered to be one of the first people to experience the assessment process.

I completed the basic assessment for ministry long ago and was offered very strong encouragement in my vocational path, along with valuable personal and professional guidance at that early stage of my ministerial life. The North Central Ministry Development Center does kind of assessment for our denomination as one of its many services as well. When it is required by the denomination, it is usually funded by them as well.

But at this time, I wanted to utilize the skills, testing, counseling, coaching, questioning and assessment process in a different way – for what I self-defined as my voluntary, self-funded “mid career assessment.”

Fulfilling denominational requirements for fellowshiping is very different than coming to a place or a point in time with your own specific agenda and vocational questions. The process needs to be much more personal and specific, the questions are unique and the answers relate not so much to whether or not you should do ministry, but how you should do that ministry. They might also reveal a new passion or direction, as well as a need to develop parts of oneself that will enhance ministerial leadership, inspiration and effectiveness in the setting in which you already find yourself.

Although there are many places to do this work, and several much closer to home, I had heard from several colleagues (whose opinions I truly respect) who wanted to pursue vocational questions, seek counseling or coaching that the NCMDC in Minneapolis, and in particular, the Center's Director, Rev. Mark Sundby, were fantastic resources for the kind of reflection in which I wanted to engage.

I sought them out late spring and we together designed a process specific to me and my questions, my ministry and my life - to take place prior to, during and after my three day visit in July. This process involved many different kinds of instruments and tests, as well as exhaustive personal reflections, autobiographical statements and several spiritual and theological contemplations.

## Assessment and Coaching at NCMDC

Although my program was personally tailored to my expressed goals and needs, the basic approach to initial Intake and Assessment in NCMDC's programs include:

- Journey of faith and vocation in ministry
- Preferred styles of leadership
- Experience of call to ministry
- Personality traits and preferences in ministry
- Strengths and limitations for ministry
- Psychosocial development as it relates to ministry
- Patterns of motivation and interest in ministry
- Emotional and psychological well-being

Their approach to ongoing Coaching is as follows:

“Coaching is a collaborative effort between an individual and their coach to improve ministerial performance, broaden professional competencies, and increase life satisfaction. We take a holistic approach to a person's current situation and future goals. Emphasis is on personal growth, professional development, and life transformation. Coaching involves meeting regularly with a counselor in person or by telephone. It is a confidential and safe place to reflect on your ministry and identify opportunities for growth.”

Coaching generally focuses on all or most of these areas:

- Leadership Skills
- Work/Life Balance

Conflict Management  
Interpersonal Effectiveness  
Life Planning

## Deep Learning and Insights

My three days at NCMDC were invaluable for me professionally and transformative personally, pointing the way to deep work to accomplish during sabbatical. While some of the insights were intensely personal, I want to share the parts that impacted most on my work as your minister – which therefore informed the sabbatical choices I made. This work is not yet completed but is essentially a blueprint for the ongoing work I need to do to build on and strengthen the insights I gained at NCMDC. Coaching continues with Rev. Mark Sundby on an ongoing basis as needed.

I apologize in advance if some of what follows seems obvious, immodest or too personal. It is very difficult to separate the personal from the professional in gaining understanding and insight into ministry, for who you are as a person has a huge impact upon who you are as a minister. For each of you to truly understand the purpose, meaning and results of the assessment I undertook therefore I believe requires genuine honesty, transparency and engagement on my part.

## Affirmation for Ministry and Leadership

The assessment was incredibly affirming for both ministry and leadership in both my aptitudes and experience. I tested very high (“at a level we rarely see”) on 18 out of 21 markers for ministry and leadership. As Rev. Sundby put it; “Don’t ever let anyone tell you that you aren’t meant to be a minister or a leader. Ministry is a perfect fit for your skill set, parish ministry in particular, and you are a natural leader.”

I demonstrated a “very mature and thorough understanding of the complexities of ministry”, the important part that self-awareness in clergy and laity play in community life, the interplay of congregational dynamics (healthy as well as “at-risk”), human organizational behaviour and the role, power, perils and pitfalls of the spiritual leader and of hopeful human community. In a word, Rev. Sundby said “You really get it; you understand the rewards and challenges of ministry in your core.”

Given a thorough understanding of the unique challenges of ministry (and in particular parish ministry in a first long term pastorate – which is becoming less and less common) the challenge then becomes how do I translate this experience and knowledge into education, example and effective leadership in my own parish setting?

## The Real and the Ideal

I believe that the chief challenge and the responsibility that come with this insight are to be able to hold the real and the ideal joyfully and hopefully (even prayerfully!) alongside one another in your ministry to a spiritual community full of imperfect souls, yourself included! As my colleague Rev. Jack Mendelsohn said in a piece entitled “Who is a Unitarian Universalist Minister?”

“A Unitarian Universalist Minister is a person never completely satisfied or satisfiable, never completely adjusted or adjustable – a person who walks in two worlds; one of things as they are, the other of things as they ought to be – and loves them both.”

Or as I put it as a Good Officer to a colleague who was struggling with what she defined as an “unhealthy” congregation and pondering how a colleague could serve there “I guess if you are an intuitive person, you can fall in love with the church that they could be!” I believe that there is always an element of idealization in all relationships where we see the “other” as we wish they could be, but religious community, with its vision of the ‘Beloved Community’ (to quote Martin Luther King Jr.), is particularly vulnerable to both the idealization and the disappointment of this approach.

Ministers too are prone to this pitfall, and I have certainly found myself in places of frustration and even conflict over the years as I tried to communicate a vision (whether that vision was of growth, kindness, inclusivity, spiritual depth, music ministry or outreach to the city, to name a few) and motivate the congregation (or occasionally the individual!) to become the church I hoped it could be. I believe that I need to take a step back from this approach and look very closely and clearly at the church “as it is,” celebrate the beauty and health that is there, ‘speak the truth in love’ about the challenges, let the congregation decide who it wants to be and serve, and move forward from there.

Or, as a Christian colleague said once when I asked about her congregation at a clergy lunch: “Oh, the church? It will be whatever God wants it to be. I don’t worry about that at all!” Her theology may differ from some of ours, but it makes the point that the minister cannot “push the river” (to use a Buddhist phrase) and can lead only by moral suasion, at most.

## Loving Your People

*“Though I may speak with bravest fire,  
And have the gift to all inspire,  
And have not love, my words are vain,  
As sounding brass, and hopeless gain.*

*Though I may give all I possess,  
And striving so my love profess,  
But not be given by love within,  
The profit soon turns strangely thin.*

*Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control,  
Our spirits long to be made whole.  
Let inward love guide every deed;  
By this we worship, and are freed.”*

My assessment also revealed great tenderness and love for the church and the people I serve. (In addition to speaking about the death of my sister, describing my call and commitment to serve the people of my church was the only other time I was moved to tears during three days of very intense



counseling.) It is a very sacred thing to me. This love I believe is essential to one Called and Covenanted to serve in ministry; it is indeed impossible to minister without it. As Rev. Robert Raible at the 50 year address to his UU ministerial colleagues said:

“There is only one rule for being an effective minister in our free church. It is to be fond of people... Make no mistake about it. If you are entering our tradition because you like to preach, or because you know truths that the world ought to hear, or because you have ideals which you want others to practice, I beg of you to quit now, before it is too late, before you cause incalculable harm. You will be useful only if you can love each person as a divine entity, as a child of God in human guise capable of infinite possibilities.”

This relationship is also one of mutual caring, with special but unique and distinct parts to play for both minister and member. Rev. John Weston (Director of Ministry Transitions, formerly called the Settlement Director at the UUA Department of Ministry and Professional Services) writes:

“The relationship of mutuality between a Unitarian Universalist Minister and a Unitarian Universalist congregation is Covenantal; mutual in trust, mutual in accountability and mutual in care. The Covenantal relationship is thus prior to any words about it. The Covenantal relationship is the most important thing.”

## Truly Incarnational Theology: What Comes to Life in You

I also discovered (or re-discovered, really) that I am at heart a preacher and a pastor, one who fortunately or unfortunately met with enough success in these roles that the church grew and I then needed to learn to become another kind of minister as well. I love the ‘Arts of Worship’ with a passion - music, poetry, beauty, aesthetics, ritual, prayer and meditation, the spoken word and creative writing and am never happier than when sharing this passion, be it in a ‘Writing for Worship’ workshop, encouraging music staff to go to the UU Musicians’ Network Conference or engaging in the weekly creative struggle of sermon research, writing, crafting liturgy and beauty and offering it on Sunday morning. I love the variety of subjects presented by the state of the world, the human condition, the turn of the year, our own UU faith, the diversity of world religions and the thousands of books and ideas that open themselves to challenge me to try and find a nugget of inspiration to help my people get through the week with a little more grace, hope, fortitude or humour and to use that grace or hope to in turn, bless and heal the world.

I am also truly in my heart a pastor - so grateful for the privilege of walking with people pastorally through the hardest passages of their lives and deeply challenged, changed and touched by one-on-one counseling, spiritual guidance and companioning. I feel a depth of indescribable gratitude and grace when I realize that my presence has made a healing difference in someone’s life and miss the opportunity to minister to people in this way on a more regular basis as the church has grown. I almost chose hospital chaplaincy as my ministerial vocation because I love the spiritual ‘purity’ of simply being with people in need. And my own recent experiences with losses and death have only served to emphasize how deeply I feel called to this way of ministering. I have given serious thought to volunteering in the now very under-funded hospital chaplaincy programs on my days off when I return to

work and Lily Rose starts school during the day.

I have been very conscious since the church started to grow about the 'sacrifice' of becoming a program church minister for me personally. I chose to become what churches our size need their minister to be – and did professional development and changed the way I do ministry - at a cost to my personal satisfaction – but did it because that's what "loving the church the way it was" - or had become - required.

But I had not realized how far from the heart of my calling it had taken me. I went into the ministry because I love people, loved going to church and making music, loved visiting those who couldn't make it to church and teaching in Sunday school and leading junior choir; because I care deeply about kindness and injustice and wanted to create a more just world and believed that being a part of and helping to lead and grow a spiritual community was one of the best ways to express and expand those passions.

Three decades later I find myself in some ways further away from those simple goals than I was back then! The advent of email and technology means I spend more time with my computer than with my parishioners, and the roles and demands of ministering to a church this size are too great in tandem with the expectations (my own and others) that accompany a smaller church (the church I was called to) and a different pastoral style of ministry. I have discovered (as do almost all colleagues in the throes of this transition) that the new set of expectations and time demands is simply added to the old one, without taking anything away! The end result is a minister who turns themselves inside out trying to be all things to all people, without even always being aware of it.

And the result for the church is that there are many different, competing and confusing ideas about what the minister is and should be doing. Conflict at this stage of the church's growth is almost inevitable, and as my first ministry assessment observed, although I have learned good professional skills about how to mediate and navigate through conflicts, I vastly prefer harmony.

## An Alternate Model

I have yet to discover a healthy church our size and larger who does not have the minister as head of staff and ultimately responsible for the health and welfare of the administration of the church, but I have begun to wonder and to research if there are alternate models out there that might free a minister with a heart like mine to do the work to which she feels most called while still having her 'hand on the rudder' helping to guide the ship.

I know that in very large congregations with multiple clergy, often one minister is called to the ministry of administration, another to the ministry of preaching and pastoring, another to social justice ministry, another to youth ministry, etc. And I know of some UU congregations that have hired staff (reporting to the minister) - who function as "chief of staff," handling the greater share of administrative leadership and administration and support staff supervision, thus freeing the minister more fully to be a spiritual leader, preacher, pastor and 'prophet.' The model with which I am most familiar was practiced at Arlington Street Church, one of our flagship Boston churches, between the Senior Minister Kim Crawford Harvie and a layperson who subsequently entered the ministry and is now the minister at

Toronto First – Rev. Shawn Newton (who is my ‘mentee’) I welcome further inquiry into this and will following it up over the next several months.

### ‘Comforting the Afflicted’ and ‘Afflicting the Comfortable’

But I know in my bones I truly am a minister who is more at home “comforting the afflicted” than “afflicting the comfortable” as the minister’s work is often described. Not when the “comfortable” are people who need to be informed and inspired about injustice in the world, but when “afflicting the comfortable” means naming and illuminating entrenched dynamics that impede the congregation’s spiritual progress, asking people to let go of long-standing ways of being and doing church, asking them to accept that their power or control will alter when professional ministry and competent staff are functioning as a team and serving the church well, asking them to understand that we cannot grow in any way – spiritually, numerically, financially, in programs or outreach, in staff or ministry, in learning, teaching, deepening or caring – without experiencing a great deal of change, and asking them to accept ministry and the role of the minister in a new way in the midst of that change. And most of all, when asking them to put the health, strength and potential ministry of the congregation ahead of or at least along side of their own personal need within that congregation.

I believe that at this stage of the church’s growth and development, these truths must be deeply realized, understood, accepted and championed by the laity before the congregation will be able to hear them from their spiritual leader. The congregation needs to mature into having a vision of its purpose, its ministry, indeed, its very reason for existence – that transcends any individual in time or space who is a part of it. If the church is to truly serve, as Protestant theologian Martin Marty said “The world before church and the world after Postude” it must have a powerful vision of internal individual personal transformation and change as well as collective engagement in ‘making heaven here on earth.’

At times we have come very close; at other times in our history we have been insular in focus and far from a unifying and transformational vision of our congregation’s ministry. But I have realized that for me as a leader and as a human being, the need for kindness and a sense of justice are some of my highest values, and I thrive in a human community that allows that to flourish.

### Micah 6:8

I will give you a concrete example from my own ministerial life. A few days before a dear, dear man named Hiram Wood died, I was to visit him again in the hospital for what I feared (and was proven right) would be the last time. I had reports to do piled sky high – staffing reports, administrative reports, reports on ministry, so many reports and documents and dozens of emails to answer and sermon preparation and tons of denominational paperwork. I was very behind in my work, but wanted to see Hiram in case this was the last chance. Peter, too, had an evening meeting and cancelled it to go with me; he loved Hiram dearly, as did I.

I thought about my last visit a few days earlier when I had brought Hiram a sprig off a flowering tree from my back yard for his bedside table. He recognized it immediately, said “That’s an apple tree” and got talking about how much he liked apple pie. (His appetite was good until the end.)

That afternoon, I weighed all the work I had to do. I felt swamped by the undone paperwork and computing I had to do so that I could be almost caught up to what I should have done yesterday. And I also thought “I could just go out and buy the best juiciest apples I can find and make Hiram a fantastic apple pie.”

I made the pie. And the reports were late or remained undone.

And for me, the unforgettable pleasure that Peter and I got watching Hiram eat that pie with great gusto - a few days before he departed this earth – passed my “end of life” test – which is “When I look back at the end of my life, will I say “I am glad I made the choices I did? I’m glad I made Hiram that pie and didn’t do those reports?” and the answer is “Yes!”

That’s who I am in my heart. And that’s who I want to be in my ministry. Maybe not baking pies for everyone in the church, but better able to put my skills, time and energy in the service of the Spirit of Love as I feel it to be: “To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with my God.” The prophet Micah (Micah 6:8) comes as close as anyone in describing it.

## Where the Holy Resides

I wrote in my sabbatical plan “While I am very comfortable with the mantle of ministerial leadership in its positive sphere and influence (eg. the opportunity to make a difference, to heal, to help, to inspire) I continue to struggle a lot with its negative manifestations; attracting projections and transference, keeping the peace in human community and personal and professional criticism both of self and others (I find unkindness in human community particularly hard to witness). Since the likelihood of a spiritual leader or indeed any member of a covenanted community completely avoiding these reactions, responses and experiences is nil, I need to decide what path I want to take to have greater inner peace with their existence.”

I consider this the most difficult aspect of ministry for me personally, and did some deep work (reading, reflection and consultation as well as spiritual partnering) on this challenge common to so many in leadership positions who aspire to excellence. It is particularly potent in the ministerial vocation where (whether your faith professes it or not) “holy power” (for good or for ill) is often felt or projected and the ministerial role is particularly vulnerable to falling short of people’s hopes and expectations (consciously expressed or unconscious).

Rev. Carl Scovel, who was for many years the minister at King’s Chapel, the oldest and probably most well-known Unitarian church in North America, said this to his colleagues upon his retirement: “I realize now how hard it was, harder than I thought at the time, harder than I dared to admit. But now I see that the hardness was due to more than an imperfect cleric and imperfect congregations. The hardness was inherent in the role of clergy, and nobody ever told me.”

As Rev. John Weston points out in his brilliant sermon “How Long Should a Ministry Last?” “Scovel recalled the idea of the great historian of religions, Mircea Eliade, that the priest, preacher, rabbi, guru, imam – any person whose task it is to treat with ultimate meaning and ultimate value – stands on the boundary between the holy and the human, the sacred and the profane. And talking to his colleagues,

Scovel went on:

“Let me posit for you that in our ordinations to ministry, no matter how plain and prosaic may have been those ceremonies, we stepped onto that boundary line between those two realms.

Whether our “most high” be the Trinity, a Heavenly Parent, Nature, the Universe, or the Best Humanity Can Think Of – regardless of our conceptions of the Other, yet all these words in different ways describe an ideal, an uncompromised order which humankind has failed and which we (ministers) are called upon to represent and interpret.

Regardless of our theologies or styles of ministry I think we all stand between our people and that to which they still aspire. The placement on the boundary is inherent in our role as clergy and the task of just standing there is, I suggest, not just heavy but impossible...We, the imperfect, are called to the imperfect, and before them to embody, incarnate, live out the tension between these two realms.”

Weston goes on to describe this tension as “the long, drawn out sacrifice of the minister on the altar of the congregation’s impossible expectations.” I believe that this deep spiritual truth about the “life ministerial” is very difficult to see from the congregation’s perspective; yet every minister I know understands exactly what Scovel and Weston are talking about.

In my own instance, I realized that I value greatly the personal sensitivity I bring to ministry, even when it makes absorbing the wounds and criticisms that are inevitable for those in leadership positions difficult or painful. After deep and studied reflection (and some good coaching) I realize that I do not want to grow a thicker skin or learn not to care as I believe that my best gifts for ministry come precisely out of my sensitivity and out of the fact that I care deeply – about the world, about my church, about our UU values, about myself and about those I love.

So it is not a matter of changing how I feel or who I am and trying to become a “more perfect minister,” but it is more a case of changing how I respond to being placed on that “altar of impossible expectations,” understanding that it is inherent in the role and trying not to take it personally.

### Integrating Grief – A Life’s Work

I stated in my Sabbatical Plan that I had “greatly underestimated the impact of ongoing grief in my personal life (the deaths of our children, infertility and the recent death of my sister) and the attendant questions and crisis of faith and meaning and how they have impacted my ministry.”

*“Sometimes I’m up and sometimes I’m down  
Oh yes, lord; sometimes I’m almost to the  
ground”*

While I have attended to these losses over the years with therapy and counseling, rituals of remembrance, journaling and writing, my efforts to heal and integrate these losses have always been fitted in between the demands of a very busy work life where an appointment with a grief therapist felt

like just one more thing to try and squeeze into my daytimer. That and the cumulative effect over time of the grief of infertility and baby loss (which is, as one counselor put it “The only loss that gets worse over time, not better!) had caught up to me.

It was very, very helpful to be able to actually take the time to do this “work of the spirit” to the depth and breadth that my sabbatical allowed.

I was able to devote substantial time and reflection to understanding the deeper ramifications of the loss of my sister (who, at 7 years older than me I realize was a second mother to me as well as a sister, soul mate and best friend) for my life and my work as well as my soul and faith. No-one in the helping profession speaks of ‘closure’ related to bereavement any more but more often ‘integration’ where the losses we all experience become a part of the fabric of our lives, not less present but over time, less painful as they are placed in the larger context of the gifts that have been given by having known and loved.

After years of missing family occasions or driving 7 hours after church on a Sunday to get there for holiday dinners and turning around again the next day to come back, it was greatly healing for me to experience the round of “firsts” together with my family; first Thanksgiving at the cottage since my sister died, first Christmas without her, the first anniversary of her death and first occasion of her Birthday since she died.



In addition, in the fall, I twice traveled to Kingston with my family to remember and honour my sister; once to see a retrospective of her art at a show put on by a group of which she was a founding member “Kingston Fibre Artists” and another time to meet and break bread with a group of her closest friends at the opening of a vegetarian restaurant run by her spiritual community.



My sister's spiritual travels took her to a Bengali guru and on the first anniversary of her death, I found myself doing yoga in India at sunrise with a Bengali yoga instructor, looking out over the ocean. I also was able to perform rituals of remembrance in Hindu temples and shrines in India and in Hindu and Buddhist ones in Nepal, from tucking a small token of her presence into an ancient stone stupa high up in the Himalayas to praying at a prayer wheel at the Bauddha, the holiest Buddhist temple in Kathmandu.





My sister left me all of her personal and spiritual journals that go back many years up until 3 days before she died, and I am slowly undertaking the intense, often painful and yet also inspiring task of going through them one at a time (there are over 30). This process, the rituals of remembrance and the work of integrating her loss and the meaning of her life into mine will continue for the rest of my life, I know. On sabbatical I began work on a large work of fabric art in her honour I have called "Her Name is Written on the Tree of Life" that will include fabrics from almost all of her own collection (including many that she made into clothing for her children when they were small) and many from her family and friends as well, including some I found in my travels on sabbatical. Several of us will meet periodically to remember, to contribute, to heal and to sew together.

Integrating the grief of infertility and baby loss is a more complex thing, as it was a loss spread out over 10 years and taking many different forms. Writing and journaling has been my saving grace, as this poem, which I wrote out of the grief of letting go of the children I had conceived and lost so that I could embrace a child of my heart – perhaps illustrates.



## To My Little One

No, not yet here  
Not born or even conceived  
Yet you are on the way  
As surely as someone  
Who has set out on a long journey

The day will come when  
Your weary feet will find your way to my door  
You will curl up in the comfort of my arms  
look up and know that you are home

Till then you live in my heart  
In my mind's eye  
In my determined spirit and stubborn body  
In my refusal to give up  
In the candle shining in the window  
In this resolute struggle to wrest life out of death

In the dark and the cold,  
Alone with no compass  
I will go out to meet you  
I will carry a light  
And I will keep walking  
I will narrow the distance  
Meet you more than half way  
I will not rest  
Until you are safe  
No mother leaves her child  
alone in the dark

When I have found you  
What will I offer?  
I want to give you the world of my choosing  
But the hard lessons of mothering  
begin before you arrive  
I cannot give you the world I would wish for you  
Only the world as it is

I cannot give you my big brown eyes  
But I can give you eyes that look on the world with wonder  
I cannot give you my happy spirit  
But I can give you the delight of a mother with a happy spirit  
I cannot give you my musical ability, or love of dance  
But I can raise you in a house filled with music

I can dance with you in my arms every day  
I can not give you my intelligence  
But I can show you books and nature,  
Ideas and people;  
Tell you stories and poems;  
Unlock the mysteries of learning and thought,  
And awaken your Spirit to awe

I cannot give you what was born in me,  
*but what I made of it*  
It is not all of me,  
but it is a good gift,  
one worth giving.

*The rest will be you.*

As for the world that I do offer  
It is not a perfect place.  
It is a place where  
sadness sometimes comes before joy  
and other times after it  
Where sometimes things work out the way you want  
sometimes another way  
and sometimes, not at all.

It is still a beautiful world  
And I still want you in it  
And I am still walking toward you  
With my small light shining  
Through this endless dark night.

My 10 year journey to motherhood has born rich lessons, spiritual insight and empathy within me, and although finally becoming a mother has gone a long way to filling the void left by infertility and the loss of my previous children, it cannot change what went before. Since I am a meaning-making person, for random suffering to have any meaning it must somehow be redeemed by what comes after, and this is not a burden I would place on our child!

It is a spiritual process that I will willingly undertake in the years to come. I do feel called to minister to families who have struggled with the grief of infertility, baby and child loss, and will do that with writing, and perhaps in time, counseling. At this time, I am in conversation with experts in the field about writing a resource called "The Spiritual Struggle of Infertility" that can be of use to them in their work, and also about being "on call" as a spiritual advisor to those who are really struggling with the crisis of faith that often accompanies the death, loss and/or absence of children.

My time at NCMDC with my clergy coach, Rev. Mark Sundby, was invaluable in helping me identify the theological and vocational issues embedded in this work and my relationship of Spiritual Partnering was

a place to which I was able to bring much of this integrative grief work. But although the losses we experience are always with us, I do feel a great 'release' of grief after giving it the time, reflection, ritual, prayer and attention it deserved.

## Generativity

The force of "Generativity" has been described as "The ability to plant a tree under whose branches you know you will not sit."

As we go through life, this ability to "pass on" what we have learned, to collaborate, to mentor, to teach, to inspire and ultimately, to let go of outcomes and the primacy of our place in the scheme of things – becomes key to our happiness and to the legacy we leave behind. I have discovered a shift in my primary orientation toward ministry that I first experienced in changing the way I do ministry to adjust to the growing size of the church, but which has been further developed as I have been asked to teach, supervise, mentor and support others in ministry. This shift has been to feel as much grace and gratitude in observing the work of those with whom I have collaborated or whom I have inspired as I do from my own efforts.

I greatly enjoy working collaboratively with people who are committed and competent as well as very talented in their fields and was gratified to finally (after 10 years of advocating!) attain Professional Music Staff and have been able to send them for professional and collegial connection and development at the UU Musicians Network Conference. I have enjoyed positive and synergistic relationships with the excellent staff by which we have been served.

I loved supervising as well as being in theological, mentoring and collegial reflection with our first Intern Minister, Karen Fraser Gitlitz, who will graduate this spring, be ordained next fall and will be serving 2 congregations next year as a Consulting Minister in Nanaimo and Salt Spring Island, British Columbia. Frederick May Eliot, former AUA President and founding Board member of the Unitarian Service Committee, received the right hand of Fellowship from his father Charles Eliot and gave it to both my former Mentor, Rev. David Pohl and Rev. Dr Alan Deale, who gave it to me at my Ordination in Boston. I have been asked to give it to two new ministers serving in Canada, the latter being Karen Fraser Gitlitz who I will happy to welcome into ministerial and collegial fellowship at the Unitarian Church of Vancouver next September, connecting her to a remarkable heritage of learning, justice-making and service.

Over the last few years I have also been privileged to walk with 2 students in Field Education (June Gilbertson and Carly Gaylor) as well as one who is already a respected denominational colleague as she transitions into theological student and ultimately ministerial colleague roles (Linda Thomson). All of these relationships have been rich and rewarding.

I have also been an official Mentor (as required by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and Department of Ministry during the first three years of "Preliminary Fellowship" in ministry) to Rev. Meg Roberts, the UU minister in Calgary and lately to Rev. Shawn Newton, the newly called and arrived minister of Toronto First. I agreed to be available to Shawn even though on Sabbatical and bring an unique perspective on ministry to the church that was my home congregation from the late 1970s until I

was ordained and called to Hamilton in 1996. I am honoured to be able to be of service to this vibrant flagship church and their dynamic new minister.

Having been an active UU since the age of 12 and a layperson for 25 years, I realized on reflection that I often still wear a “layperson’s hat” when I approach issues and am still sometimes surprised to find myself in a leadership role. Yet as the longest serving minister in Hamilton’s history and, at 12 years, the second longest-serving minister presently serving their congregation in Canada, I have to begin to acknowledge the value of what I have learned and have to pass on. And I need to be conscious about sharing it with others in ministry. This is a gift that the congregation has grown in me and, I believe, a gift that together we can and should offer to other students and an expanding professional staff.

## UU Values

**The UU Principle I feel is most connected to the insights gained through the Ministry Development Center is Principle 4...**

**• A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;**

**... And the first theological “Source:”**

**• Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;**

## Star Island Unitarian Retreat Centre – Personal Retreat September 14-16 2007

*“...The spirit of the Shoals absorbs what we consider highest, noblest, and even most heroic in the human spirit. We have become a community of the spirit reaching together toward our ideas and encouraging one another in the process. Star Island, simply, asks of us a certain height. Our island has been asking this of us ever since we first came here. We have all responded by stretching a bit and feeling a bit taller. We expect it of other Star Islanders. They expect it of us. We feel we must not let one another down.”—Fred McGill*



Time on magical Star Island is “time away from time” and it was the perfect setting to truly begin the contemplative part of my sabbatical. It is a place steeped in UU history (indeed friends of mine from Toronto First, Victor and Nancy Knight, after whom the Knight Award, given to the most distinguished Canadian Unitarian every year at the Canadian Unitarian Council Annual Meeting – were, I believe, the first UU couple to be married in the chapel there in the 1920s) with traditions going back over a century, (the first summer conferences were held there in 1897) connecting us to our UU spiritual ancestors in place and time. I had previously visited Star as a day visitor and attended Religious Education week there to complete one of the Renaissance modules as a theological student, but was thrilled this time to be asked to lead worship in historic Gosport Chapel. It was also wonderful to take Peter there for the first time to have him experience a place so special to me.

### Deep Learning and Insights

Star Island’s worship tradition is revered among UUs as the most meaningful parts of the Star Island experience. For decades, worship begins after sunset from the moment you leave the “ordinary world” (symbolized by each person being given a hurricane lantern as they leave the porch of the Oceanic Lodge) and observing complete silence until you return, with the only words heard the words spoken or sung in worship. The silent “torchlight parade” winds slowly up the rocky hill until you reach the chapel, where the lanterns are hung one at a time on beautiful wooden cross sconces. The light from each succeeding lantern glows brighter until from outside the chapel is ablaze with light in the darkness and within one is able to read the words of hymns from the hymnal. Then the service begins with singing, prayer, readings, inspiration and the offerings of music or spiritual insight from the gathered ‘congregation.’



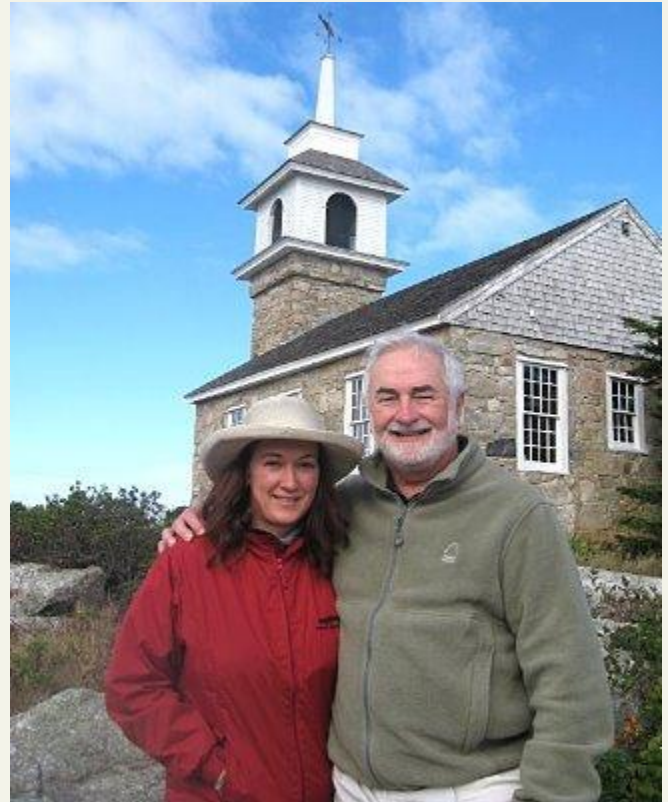
The deep learning for me in leading the service on Star was the metaphor of the “only words being the ones spoken or sung in worship;” that the only words we should speak should be the ones that express our highest value. This is a powerful metaphor for religious community and was a profound insight for me that relates to how I preach, how I act, how I lead, how I live and how I love. Like all such insights, it is hard to get across in mere words how it has changed me.

The time I was there was a weekend in September after the official “conference season” has ended and Star is inhabited by individual retreatants as well as by several different small conferences. There was a music and dance weekend, yoga weekend, small choir workshop, and a “Star Women” conference, to name just a few. What is lovely is that it is a tradition among those groups to invite participation and cross-pollination from the members of the other groups – and all groups break bread together. We all got to meet each other and experience each other’s reason for coming to Star - whether physical, spiritual, musical or simply to commune with other good souls.

This was reminiscent to me of a model for interfaith community that some clergy women colleagues and I used to dream of in theological school – we called it “The Temple.” Somewhat similar to the models for “community churches” present in some small towns, but with an interfaith rather than ecumenical vision; it represented to us the best of humanity’s common ground coming together in mutual service. It reminded me of the hope I have in the past invested in interfaith collaboration as a model for a peaceful world. I have always felt that UU religious community was uniquely poised to lead the way in this endeavour and would be willing to invest personally in it.



Finally, Star represents such a link to our UU past – particularly our New England Unitarian history. It was wonderful to feel so at home in a place that has nurtured and sustained everyone from Nathaniel Hawthorne to last year’s “Pelicans” (young adults who are the Island’s main employees – working as a “Pel” is described as “the best summer job in New England” by Yankee magazine - many UU youth end up there!) Being there was a reminder of the depth and breadth of the religious tradition in which I serve – honouring those who have come before and reminding me that I hold my part in this faith tradition in trust for those who will come after. It also served to remind me that I am Unitarian Universalist to the core but need to be connected to the wider circle of our faith to keep grounded in our tradition, and that my vision of religious community extends beyond the boundaries of those we already serve.



## UU Values

**The UU Principles I feel are most connected to the insights gained on Star Island are Principle 7**

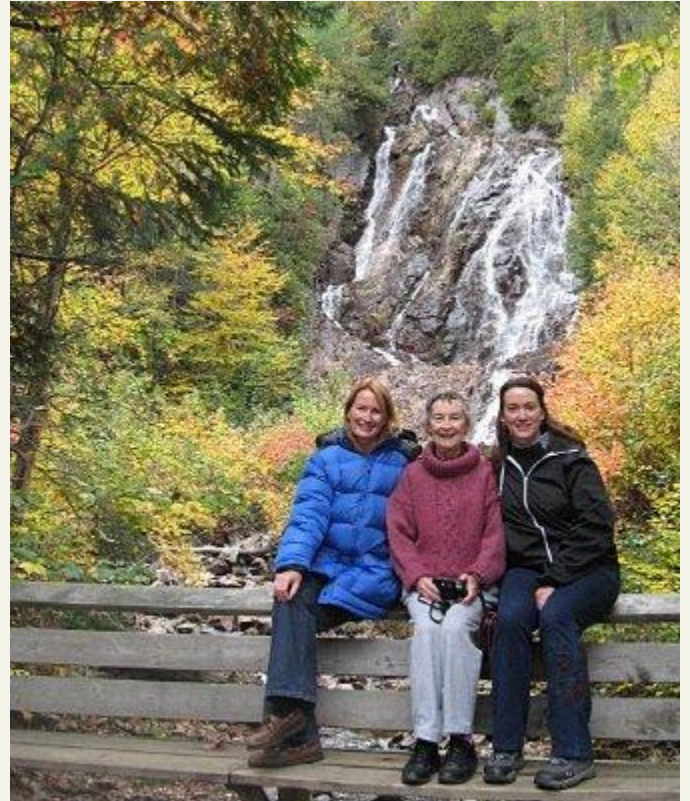
- **Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.**

And the first theological source (see above) the second and the sixth (below)

- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love;
- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

## Whence Cometh My Help: The Rocky Mountains, The Himalayas and the Agawa Canyon

Again, it is difficult to capture spiritual insights and experiences fully in words, but I spent a lot of time among mountains on this sabbatical with people I love. After a 2 week trip in an open car through the Rocky Mountains (from Banff to Denver) I feel as if I *actually* saw the Rocky Mountains (and *all* their animal inhabitants - grizzlies, black bear, white tailed and mule deer, rocky mountain goats, big horned sheep, moose, bison, elk, pronghorn antelope, beaver, and many smaller mammals, bald eagles, osprey and other large raptors) for the first time. It was indescribably wonderful to be at home in nature with animals roaming freely with their young (although it was also occasionally a little disconcerting – as in the time a mama black bear crossed the road in front of our open car and her cub did not follow – putting us in between them!)



In the Himalayas, in the areas we climbed, we saw mostly domesticated animals, but full sized male yak, although mostly gentle, can seem quite intimidating, (at up to 2,400 lbs) especially as we were on foot! I have a pair of photographs, one taken immediately above me on the path and the other immediately below, both of very curious, extremely large yaks. Needless to say, I backed into the woods to let them pass by! Peter and also encountered a mama black bear and her cub at a short distance on a walk up to the lookout in the Agawa Canyon (whose sides are supposedly too steep for large wildlife to descend!) In all these experiences I felt very much put in my proper place as a human being, but one of the many creatures who depend on the planet for survival – but as well the only one with the capacity, and we hope, the will to protect it.

As always it was humbling and inspiring and ultimately very healing to be in the eternal presence of mountains. I was reminded of poems by Nancy Wood, some of which are in our hymnal “Singing the Living Tradition.”

*"My help is in the mountain  
Where I take myself to heal*



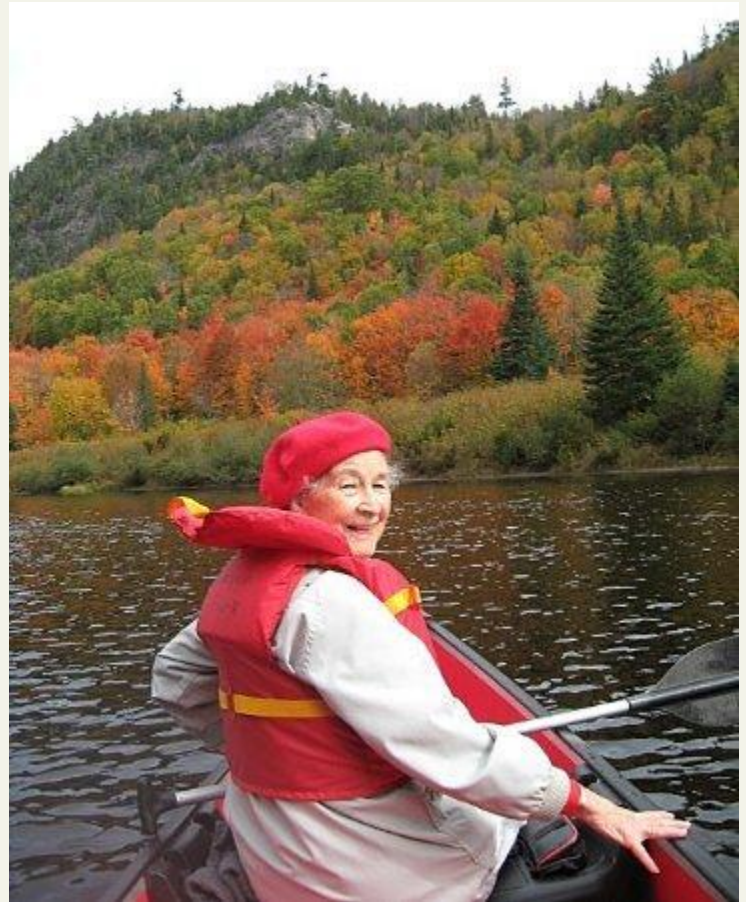
*The earthly wounds  
That people give to me  
I find a rock with sun on it  
And a stream where the water runs gentle  
And the trees which one by one give me company.  
So must I stay for a long time  
Until I have grown from the rock  
And the stream is running through me  
And I cannot tell myself from one tall tree.  
Then I know that nothing touches me  
Nor makes me run away.  
My help is in the mountain  
That I take away with me."*

And this one:

*"Earth cure me. Earth receive my woe. Rock  
strengthen me. Rock receive my weakness. Rain  
wash my sadness away. Rain receive my doubt.  
Sun make sweet my song. Sun receive the anger  
from my heart. Earth cure me."*

And of course, by Psalm 121 – A Song of Ascents “I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains, from whence cometh my help.”

I was reminded at all times of the deep peace, healing and messages of hope and rebirth inherent in nature. In my train ride and subsequent camping trip to the Agawa Canyon with my mother and my sister, we had an incredible opportunity to do some healing work for three people most affected by my sister's death. Losing a sibling at 47 years of age was a powerful reminder of the finite nature of all our days, and it was a great privilege to be able to spend such a beautiful week with my 82 year old mother, including going canoeing with her all around the Agawa River. Time in nature was an intrinsic part of the healing and personal transformation that occurred for me on sabbatical; I began to finally sleep well, lose weight and feel my energy return after years of insomnia during my sister's illness and death. Although I have been blessed with good mental and physical health and a very happy marriage, the stresses, losses and strains of the last few years had begun to accumulate in me, body and soul. After an opportunity on sabbatical to re-order my priorities, I am happier and healthier than I have been in a while. I need to retain this healthy way of living as well as a sense of the preciousness of time with those I love and the finite nature of it as I return to the work I also love.



*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,  
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.*

## Deep Learnings

There is no point in the future when there will be more time available for those I love. There is no substitute for taking care of myself and my soul in order to serve the world. Regular time in nature restores my soul and feeds my spirit. I need to learn how to live richly in the moment so that the choices I make are a reflection of my deepest priorities.

## UU Values

- The UU Principles I feel are most connected to the insights gained in nature are Principle seven and the first and sixth theological source (please see above).

## Choral Music Workshop and Celebration with Brian Tate – October 26-28 2007

I was the organizer of this weekend workshop (with some help on the welcome and home hospitality front from members of our congregation) and having never undertaken something like this before – it was definitely a learning curve for me!

In invited not only all of the musicians and members of the southern Ontario UU churches but also many local churches, temples and synagogues and specifically the music and choir directors, many of whom I met personally when I delivered the flyer, as well as groups like the McMaster Gospel Choir and McMaster Choir, WomEnchant Choir and others. In all both laity and clergy of 8 UU congregations came, including music staff and youth for a total of 65 registrants.



My goals as laid out in the In-Depth Sabbatical Plan were five fold:

- Celebrate our music ministry in Hamilton by rewarding our music staff with a workshop

- Use music ministry as outreach to the city to minister to others and to raise our profile
- Support other UU congregations in their music ministry to grow and benefit their churches
- Invite young adults (via the university choirs) into our midst to potentially interest them
- Grow the spirit of all who attend and enjoy the fruits of this wonderful weekend!

An additional benefit for me was that I got back in touch with the profound importance of music to my spiritual life, indeed it was the channel by which I first found my way into the Unitarian church. And even more so, in collaborating with Brian on the choice of songs, and in learning and singing them for worship on Sunday morning, I felt as if I found my own voice in some ways for the first time. It may be hard to imagine for someone who speaks publicly every week and it is difficult to explain, but simple songs like the Contemplation Chant (with music overlaid and set to holy words from several different religious traditions in several different languages) to Brian's pieces "Together We Are" and "Come in Peace" to the incomparable beauty of the gospel anthem "Yes" - every moment that weekend seemed like a reminder of who I am and why I am called to do what I do. I have never sung so well nor felt so close to the Spirit of Life.

I was also gratified to hear that the choir gathered at that workshop has continued to sing together and even "went on the road" to each others' congregations, increasing music ministry in each place it traveled. I also believe that the workshop raised the profile of music ministry in the area in general, and that support for music ministry has increased. I don't claim a causal connection at all but did organize the workshop with a particular hope of supporting music ministry at Toronto First, where they are about to hire a Director of Congregational Music after many years of declining music programming.

## Deep Learnings

Playing music and singing are an essential, not an optional part of the spiritual life that feeds my ministry and my soul. Music is where I pray and praise, give thanks and grieve, deeply feel, live and sustain my faith.

*My life flows on in endless song, above earth's lamentation.  
I hear the clear, though far off hymn that hails a new creation.  
No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that rock I'm clinging.  
Since love is lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?  
Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear that music ringing.  
It finds an echo in my soul. How can I keep from singing?*

## UU Values

**The sources which most connect to what I learned and experienced that weekend are the first (see above) and fourth source:**

- **Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;**



**But again, it is our covenant as an association of congregations that was most at the forefront for me in planning this workshop “As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.”**

## **Journeys to Nepal and India November 4 -20 2007 Nepal January 8-17, 2008 India**

As a committed Board member of the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada (USC Canada) we have ongoing invitations to experience the true “field work” that USC does by accompanying USC Program and Field Staff on visits to their many projects around the world. However, contrary to what I eventually discovered is a common misconception, USC’s modest budget cannot fund these consciousness-raising trips for Board members, many of whom can also not afford time away from farming or professional work. They are by necessity self-funded and accommodations, provisions and transportation are certainly not luxurious or often even comfortable, although they can sometimes still be a sight better than the average Nepali experiences in their own home.

Often we stayed with farmers who gave us their own or their children’s beds and, as is their custom, fed us first at a place of honour while they and their family ate on the floor in the kitchen (Nepali style). Hot water and sometimes bathing were non-existent as was heating beyond the kitchen fire - even in the Himalayan mountain cold (chimneys are rare in rural Nepali homes and so smoke is thick inside dwellings) and you slept in the clothes you wore the previous day.

When I realized that my sabbatical would coincide with a planned USC Field Trip into two distinct areas of Nepal, one to Sindhuli in the sub-tropical Terai, close to the border with India and mostly Hindu and the other in Rasuwa close to the border with Tibet, much colder, mountainous and mostly Buddhist) I jumped at the opportunity to participate hands on in this work to which I am so committed.

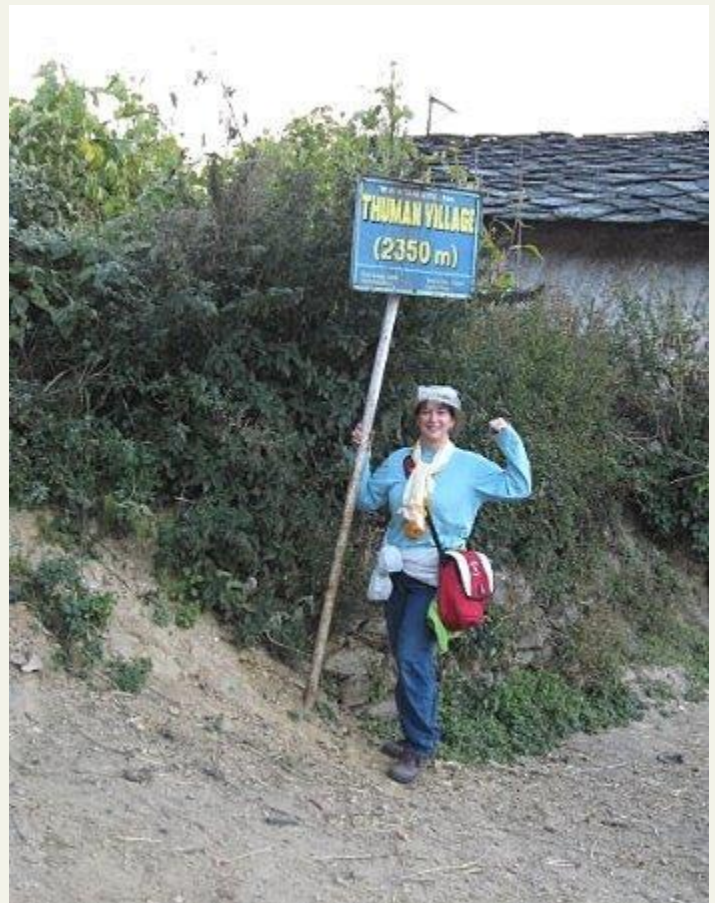
It is difficult to get across in mere words what it is like to travel to a place like Nepal with USC. Our work there ranges from riverbank conservation and reforestation, to building schools, irrigation and clean water facilities, to supporting farmers in trusting their indigenous knowledge, promoting sustainable agriculture and ecological and organic farming, to gender and equity training among women, men and youth as well as support in countering domestic violence and abuse, to seed saving and promoting genetic diversity and food sovereignty, supporting domestic industry, literacy, organizing savings, loan and micro-credit programs and strengthening civil society.



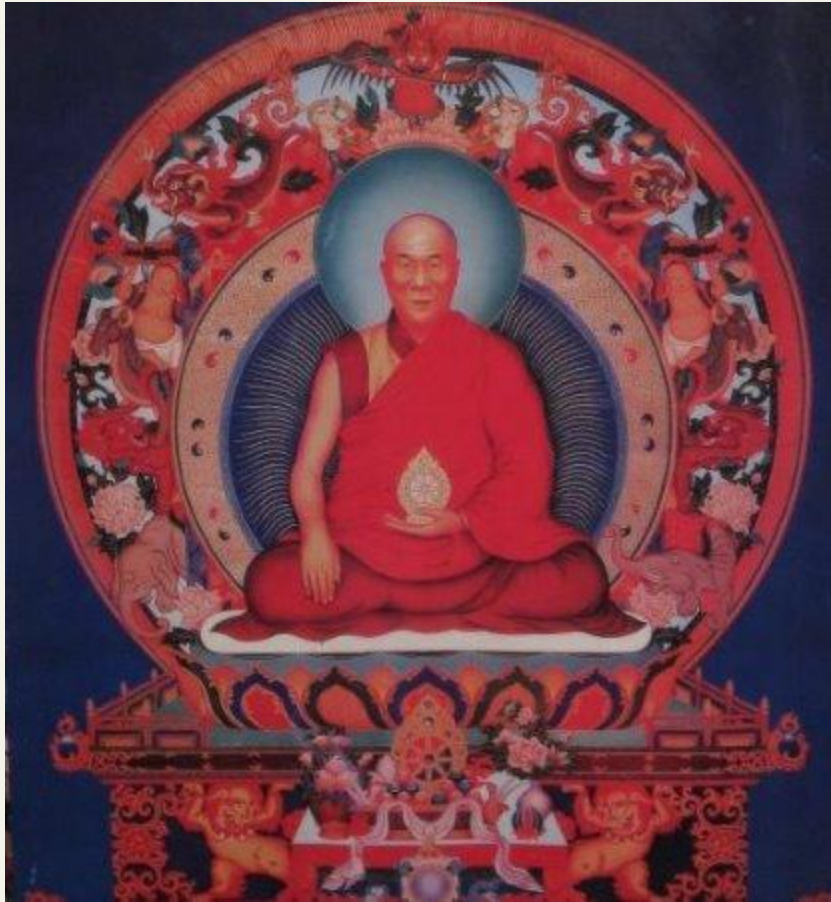
Simply traveling to the villages and farms that are served by USC's programs is a very daunting prospect, and I have incredible respect both for the Canadian Program staff and the Nepali Field staff who undertake it on a regular basis. Absolutely treacherous roads one lane wide that consist of giant uneven rocks and no guard rail winding for miles along the tops of cliffs which are a sheer drop a few meters away; villages that are a 5 hour climb straight up to almost 8,000 feet (the same altitude as Machu Picchu or Mount St. Helens) with no stopping (I thought I was going to have a heart attack until an ancient Nepali couple with a bad cough carrying about 50 lbs of firewood each, sprinted past me and shamed me into going on) narrow footpaths that crumble away to rockslides during the spring runoff from the Himalayas, and are sometimes only a foot wide with about a 200 storey fall 3 feet to your right... it's not work for the faint of heart.

In fact, I joked with USC staff and Board members at the latest meeting that both their selection and orientation process should feature a grueling fitness and stress tests, driving (and passenger) tests, use “fear factor” tests to rule out fear of heights, insects, spiders, drowning, claustrophobia, vertigo and anyone without a cast iron stomach – as well as offer kidnapping insurance (we were held up for many hours on the last day because of a Maoist kidnapping and hostage taking and told initially that no-one could leave until it was resolved, which typically takes several weeks!)

Nepal is a wondrous, complex and beautiful country that is emerging from a time of civil war and is not yet entirely stable (nor was it when I was there). Yet I have never in my life been greeted with such hospitality, such generosity and such kindness, most often by people who had almost nothing themselves, let alone anything to share. It makes a big impression on you to be offered all the food that a village has; to be spiritually inspired by the generosity of spirit of the poorest people you will ever meet and then to come home to your own land where we have so much and are so often not happy or are discontented with our lot in life. It changes who you are in your soul.







I was also incredibly impressed with the respectful blend of Hinduism and Buddhism evident in Nepali society as well as an amazing ethnic diversity that seems to coexist harmoniously. (No doubt there is racism and of course, the caste system in Hindu Nepal, but there seems to be an absence of the ethnic or religious strife that plagues so many of her neighbours.) Most Hindus and Buddhists I met had shrines in their homes with symbols from both religions and expressed both knowledge of and respect for others' faiths. I was asked about my religion with genuine interest more than has usually been the case in other countries. And I and my traveling companions, USC's agronomist and geneticist Awegechew Teshome and Courtney Clark, USC Program Director for Nepal, Bangladesh and East Timor were invited to celebrate Tihar (the Nepali version of the Hindu holy day of Divali) while we were there.





I am so committed to the work of the USC that I was asked and agreed to become a member of the Executive of the Board and to use my skills to do some writing for them. An short article about a woman farmer I met in Sindhuli was published in the January “Jottings” - formerly Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova’s travel notes and now the official newsletter of USC Canada. More creative writing for USC will be forthcoming in the months to come.

## India

USC plans sometime change and the staff person originally chosen to accompany me to India was unable to go after all, so my visit to USC programs in Bangalore will have to be postponed. However, I was able to fit in a trip to Mumbai in January where I was able to visit a well-known slum that is next to IIT. Literally only a wall away from this bastion of intellectual privilege over 40,000 people live without the basics of food, water, sanitation or education. Under the auspices of a friend who works very closely with women leaders within that slum, I was permitted to visit and meet with many of the community leaders there and to learn about their own efforts to improve the lives of the people living there. This work parallels work to which I have been committed for a long time with both USC and Child Haven International.





It is impossible to go and see the contrast between the haves and the have-nots (which I have witnessed before many times but never seen so starkly illuminated as by the wall built around the enclave that is IIT!) and not be moved to become more involved in trying to equalize the gross imbalance of fairness, fortune and misfortune in the world. As I said in my Sabbatical Plan “With the passage of time and personal growth, there is a natural radiation outward from self to other to community to world, and a mature ministry often follows that path as well. I need to be vigilant and hear the call to service beyond the church in the wider world and explore and encourage my passion for world community and justice ministry.”

My work at NCMDC identified this area of ministry as a natural outgrowth of the stage of life and awareness in which I find myself, and there is no question that I want to give it more thought, more reflection, more time and more of my passion over the next 20 years or so.

William Blake wrote: Can I see another's woe, and not be in sorrow too?  
Can I see another's grief, and not seek for kind relief?

This seems to me to be *the* essential human, religious and spiritual question.

## Deep Learning and Insights

From my experiences in Nepal and India I realize that I feel myself to be as much a world citizen as a Canadian, as much a universal religionist as a Unitarian Universalist, and as much a lay servant of the world as an Ordained Minister. My challenge will be to shape this knowledge into a form that can “be of use” both in the congregational setting in which I serve and in the other places in the world that could benefit from this approach, and to find a place of balance among it all.

## UU Values

**In truth, all seven UU Principles felt very connected to my work in Nepal and India as they apply to world community as well as congregational life:**

- **The inherent worth and dignity of every person;**
- **Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;**
- **Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth**
- **A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;**
- **The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within society at large;**
- **The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;**
- **Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.**

**And especially our third Source**

- **Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;**

## Spiritual Partnering





Spiritual Partnering is a wholistic, peer-based program of spiritual direction, insight, commitment, devotion and renewal. It has been described as a “partnership between equals for the purpose of spiritual growth.” It is distinct from spiritual direction in that it assumes a mutual capacity for spiritual insight, healing and discernment, whereas the spiritual direction model requires a “director” or teacher with greater insight and training and a student with presumably lesser abilities who is looking for “direction.”

Spiritual Partnering has always seemed to me to be a model much more in synch with our Unitarian Universalist beliefs, philosophy and practice of “the priesthood of all believers” and the basis of our Protestant faith – the idea that the ability to connect to the divine is within each of us equally, therefore we do not need to go through a superior intercessor - than is the traditional Spiritual Direction model (born out of the Roman Catholic faith) where there is an expert with skills who does not engage in a mutual process but tries to facilitate the learning of the student.

Throughout my sabbatical, I revived and reconnected a long time relationship of Spiritual Partnering with my former Spiritual Partner and colleague, The Reverend Lutia Lausane, who is an ordained United Church Minister, and also a musician, storyteller and producer and writer/performer for 18 years of the children’s television program Blue Rainbow! She is also on the Board of the Ontario Society of Psychotherapists and trained in Jungian analysis – quite a diverse and eclectic skill set to bring to our long time connection.

Checking in with each other more than 10 years after our relationship of Spiritual Partnering came to a close when I moved to Hamilton has been an amazingly grounding experience. Lutia’s insights into Parish Ministry, the life of the spirit, the role of music in ministry, her interpersonal skills and family systems knowledge (along with her friendship) have been an invaluable asset in reflecting on the changes, challenges and insights that arose during sabbatical. I have decided as well to form a slightly larger partnership I am calling a “Clearness Committee” after the Quaker term that includes two other colleagues to walk each other through the spiritual and theological reflection that is so essential to the life ministerial. I feel well-supported and companioned in my ministry – more so than in a long while.

## UU Values

**Our third Principle is almost the embodiment of the purpose of Spiritual Partnering:**

- **Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations (but also in ourselves!)**

# Reading



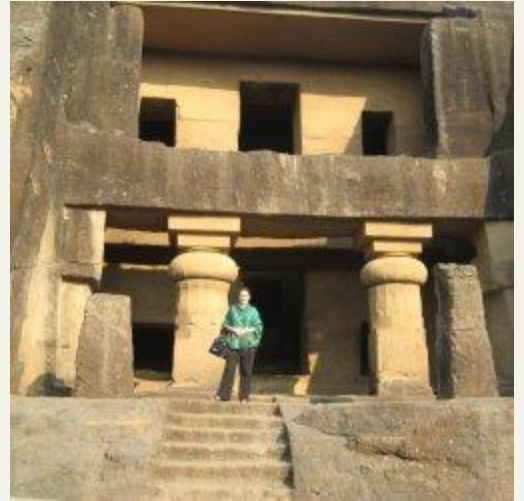
While traveling almost the entire months of September, November and January, the periods in between were rich opportunities to read and reflect in ways that are difficult to accomplish given the weekly demands of reading for the ministerial life. I read and occasionally re-read many books on poverty, justice, environmental ethics and the global weather and food crises, politics (in particular the middle east), societal change and collapse, gratitude and spiritual practice, spirituality, prayer and meditation manuals and writings in several different faith traditions, clergy self care, “The Call” and the life ministerial, the life and work of a “senior pastor” in a church our size, family systems theory in congregational life, congregational dynamics and healthy congregations theory (I am a trained facilitator of the Alban Institute’s Peter Steineke’s “Healthy Congregations” workshops), healing and pastoral practice, grief and bereavement and the UUA Commission on Appraisal’s work going back 15 years which includes “Our Professional Ministry” “Interdependence – Renewing Congregational Polity” “The Meaning of Membership” and “Engaging our Theological Diversity.” Although I did not complete the list of “50 life-changing” books I assembled by surveying colleagues, I hope to get to them over the fall!

I also read some fiction which I usually reserve for the summer; as my former mentor Rev. David Pohl says “You must read for fun as well as for work!” For fun and pure pleasure I read biographies, (often of UUs but sometimes just of people I find interesting) as well as novels from my favourite and from recommended writers (Canadian and international authors) and indulge my passion for poetry and the writings of mystics from all times and places. I also became much more knowledgeable about our new hymnal supplement and learned its hymns and tried to play music every day and sing a lot.

**Deep Learning and Insights** - too numerous to mention but in summary, I feel full of ideas and ready to preach and to share my learning and reflections in worship with all of you!

**UU Values** - All of our UU Principles and Purposes were reflected in my reading material!

## Limitations and Additions



### Limitations

There were a number of hoped for goals that were not able to be achieved. The “Great Ocean Walk” in Australia, envisioned as a healing “Spirit Quest” for my sister Liz and I in honouring our sister Joan had to be postponed when we discovered in late November that we were soon to become parents and had to go to China in January instead! We will do this “Spirit Quest” – likely after my sister’s youngest graduates from high school and moves out, and after Lily Rose is either able to come with us (I hadn’t pictured a stroller on it exactly, but you never know) or is able to stay home without me – which may be a little while! I am certainly not all sorted, organized and completely computer literate, and have not completed the process of collating and gathering my sermons and writings into some sort of printable state; but there is still the fall to make some progress on that.

Finally, I had to let go of being the Worship Chair of CONVO 2009, the every seven years’ gathering of UU ministers from across the continent. I was very honored to have been asked to join the committee and then nominated by my peers to head up the “Worship” portfolio and assume the Chair of Worship for a gathering in excess of 500 colleagues and especially to have special responsibility for something of great import to my colleagues and a passion of mine – worship, music and aesthetics as well an input into the Program pieces.

Past meetings have stretched over 3 -4 days in sometimes far off locations, and included colleagues from all over the continent; I was scheduled to host a 4 day meeting in February two 2 weeks after coming home with Lily Rose. I had made the commitment, begun to assemble my team/committee, and expected to give it a tremendous amount of time and energy over the next 2 years. But as the work to which I had committed really ramps up this year while I am on parental leave, I agonized over the decision, but it felt impossible to me to do both. As well, as my decision was pending, the only person of colour on our committee got a full time job with the UUA that precluded them from being on the CONVO committee, and it became necessary to seek persons of colour for balance within the

committee. So my decision dovetailed with a felt need within the committee to expand its membership, to someone different than I as well.

## Additions

I was called on to do some additional ministry work while on sabbatical. I was an active participant in several of my ongoing clergy groups and prepared case studies for them and for my clergy coach. I conducted the funeral of Marion Bourns, the wife of the former President of McMaster, Dr. Arthur Bourns as a personal favour to a friend, and preached in our Olinda congregation following the sudden and unexpected death of the son of a colleague, Rev. Christine Hillman. Both of these services are attached in the Appendix.

I also sadly was called upon to conduct the funeral of Celeste Cullen, a long time member of our church. I have been told that there may have been people (perhaps only one, I don't know) who were upset because they thought it 'inappropriate' to see me conduct Celeste's funeral while on parental leave.

To this I can only respond that there are many models for ministerial engagement while on parental leave, some of which maintain quite a strong ministerial presence and connection while the minister is relieved of regular daily and weekly tasks.

In addition, I was contacted by both the Chair of the Board and Congregational Health in response to Celeste's death which occurred three days after our return home from China with Lily Rose. I responded out of compassion for her family and friends and out of deep respect and affection for Celeste, who was a parishioner of mine and a very dedicated church member for many years – in the way that any minister (indeed, I believe any caring human being) would; I ministered to her family and to her friends, and did my utmost to create a service for her that would honour her life and be a force for healing in the face of her death.

These services are a part of my covenant of Ordination, to help and heal the bereaved, and I would never say no to such a request. If it was not my honour and duty to do this for Celeste, and for her family, whose was it?

# Conclusions



My conclusions are many, embedded in the body of this report, but the highlights for me are:

- I feel healed and sustained by the deep work of the spirit I was able to focus on that relates to grief and wholeness. I released and integrated a lot of grief
- I am happier, healthier and living my life in a more balanced way than I have in a while
- The Love that comes to life in me is best expressed creatively, in music, worship, preaching and writing and pastorally in inspiring, teaching and caring for people.
- These are my strengths and I need to partner with the congregation in a way that allows me to play from my strengths
- I need to continue to find and honour my own unique voice and “let it sing”
- I need to do my work in a way that leaves time for family and friends and self care – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual
- I love the work of ministering to ministers and am called to share what I have learned
- I feel myself to be a citizen of the world and my ministry should reflect this
- I believe ministry to be in its heart about hospitality and want my life to reflect this
- I am full of ideas and eager to share the fruits of my labours
- And I love my people and the church I serve!

*When true simplicity is gain'd,  
To bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd,  
To turn, turn will be our delight,  
Till by turning, turning we come round right.*



# Appendix

## Principles of The Canadian Unitarian Council

We, the member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council, covenant to affirm and promote:

- the inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- a free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

## Sources

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

- direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbours as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- spiritual teachings of Earth-centred traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free

congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

*And did those feet in ancient time,  
Walk upon England's mountains  
green:  
And was the holy Lamb of God,  
On England's pleasant pastures  
seen!  
And did the Countenance Divine,  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here,  
Among these dark Satanic Mills?  
  
Bring me my Bow of burning gold;  
Bring me my Arrows of desire:  
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold:  
Bring me my Chariot of fire!  
I will not cease from Mental Fight,  
Nor Shall my sword sleep in my  
hand:  
Till we have built Jerusalem,  
In England's green & pleasant Land.*

A Service in Memory and Celebration of the Life of Celeste Cullen  
A Service of Remembrance and Celebration of the Life of Marion  
Harriet Bourns  
Service at The Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda