

THE ALOHA SERMON

Rev. Scott W. Alexander, Preaching

Sunday, July 25, 2021

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Vero Beach

Well, dear friends....the time has finally come for me to formally take my leave from my time here as your settled minister after eleven happy and satisfying years. I am, of course, deeply honored to continue to serve you as your Minister Emeritus (a largely honorific title you kindly bestowed upon me earlier this year...that will enable me to stay connected – as a minister -- to this congregation I so love) but I am today officially moving on from my beloved full-time, paid work here.

Now...as I leave...I want you all to know that when I announced my intention to “retire” about a year ago now, I honestly thought I would “quit” working as a full-time minister – dabbling perhaps (in the future) here and there with preaching and other ministerial work within the UUA, but not officially serving another congregation. But as I got closer to my retirement deadline me (and others who know me and my rather prodigious energy level well) wondered what-in-the-world I would do to keep myself busy, happy, and satisfied. Then, fortuitously – just a few weeks ago – the UUA sent me (and the other retired and retiring ministers) an e-mail announcing the alarming fact that (for the first time in decades – assumedly mostly because of the scores of “boomer generation” ministers reaching retirement age like me) there were not enough ministers to serve the congregations seeking professional leadership, and asking if we would consider coming back into the workforce. Well...that gentle nudge was all it took! So now (as most of you know) I have signed up for a two-year interim ministry with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Reston, Virginia, just outside our nation’s capital. Collins and I have bought a wonderful little one-bedroom Condo in the Northwest section of DC. This next chapter of my professional life (which will – by the way -- mean that in two years I will complete 50 straight years of service as a full-time minister!) will be a totally new and challenging adventure...for being an “interim minister is nothing like being a “settled” minister...but more on that on some other occasion!

But what I want to assure all of you (on this farewell occasion) is that my leaving Vero Beach this summer to serve one more congregation is in no way reflective of any dissatisfaction or unhappiness on my part. In fact it is the OPPOSITE! The fact that I want to serve one more congregation is reflective of the fact that my ministry here has been a great gift and an unremitting pleasure...this has been the most fulfilling and joyful settlement of my long ministerial career. My satisfying time here has lead me to want to serve just a bit longer...so in literal fact I am going to Reston because “you people are the best!”

Collins and I are keeping our beloved home here in Vero Beach (from which he will work part-time for his DC-based employer in the coming year) and we fully expect (and look forward to) spending a significant portion of each year of our retirement (whenever that actually comes!) here on the Treasure Coast.

So this is not a “farewell” sermon in the traditional sense, but rather an “Aloha” sermon!

[the Aloha definition is projected up on the chancel screens]

Aloha: The Hawaiian word for love, affection, peace, compassion and mercy that is commonly used as a simple greeting but has a deeper cultural and spiritual significance to native Hawaiians for whom the term is used to define a force that holds together existence.

As you can see from this definition **[SCOTT READS DEFINITION]** the Hawaiians say “Aloha” to one another (when they are facing any sort of arrival or departure or other meaningful life event) as a spiritual way of affirming THEIR CARING AND CONTINUING RELATIONSHIP. So as I leave Vero Beach for my work in Washington DC, I am not saying some sort of final “goodbye” but rather “**Aloha**”...a simple, heart-felt salutation to acknowledge (and pray) that life will hold us all together (in friendship, affection and love) until we see each other again.

[DEFINITION OF “ALOHA” COMES DOWN OFF CHANCEL SCREENS]

Alright...So as I do my gentle leave-taking this morning, I wanted to symbolically give various ones of you (who represent different aspects of congregational life here at UUFVB) GIFTS – which will hopefully serve to remind all of us of the **important work** and **persistent wonder** of this community of faith.

Gifts to be “given away” by Rev. Scott Alexander on my final Sunday

Worship Committee – **Laura Matson** -- **Lamp oil for the chalice.**

It is so terribly important – every Sunday – that (as a community of faith) we create and share in quality/inspiring/intellectually and spiritually sound worship...so we can nourish the hearts and minds of our members and friends, and keep attracting new people to our community and faith. SUNDAY WORSHIP IS THE WORKSHOP OF OUR PROGRESSIVE FAITH...it’s when and where we articulate and embody the spirit and substance of our Unitarian Universalist faith...where we remind ourselves of the twin pillars of worship...GRATITUDE FOR LIFE...AND DUTY TO LIFE. As I said last Sunday, so VERY much is humanly at stake right now at this moment in history) in our community, nation and world...we must faithfully be about the hard/holy business of our Unitarian Universalist faith each and every Sunday in this sacred space.

Music – **Bonnie Pendleton** -- **The case of our congregation's musical chimes.**

Music is such a vital component of worship and life here at UUFVB .

Rumi, the 11th Century Persian mystic said it best for music in church:

Why is there always music in this house?

Here is a treasure, the world could not contain:

A house of love with no limits...

Come in...

The beloved is here...

Don't sit outside wondering...

Here all is mercy and love...

Bonnie...Keep the choir strong and growing

Be open to many forms of musical expression

Support Emily...the new Music Director...in her quest to create beautiful music every Sunday.

Music soothes and uplifts the soul of persons and the congregation as a whole.

Religious Education – **Kelly Stephens** – **Helium balloons for the kids.**

One of the most important (and sacred) duties (and joys) of any congregation is to pass on to our children clear values and responsibilities to guide their living...and to teach them reassurance, joy and hope in the face of all life's many complexities.

Membership – **Marion Wenzel** - **The membership book**

As I have repeatedly affirmed over my years here, new members are the creative life blood of any congregation...and so it is crucial that we remain warm and welcoming to all who come to our door here at 1590 27th Avenue. Further...what some don't know is that all American religious congregations experience about a **"9% Churn"** each and every year (which has been our recent experience here at UUFVB)...people die, move or leave the congregation for other reasons . So...we need (t our current size) to welcome almost 30 new members a year just to hold our numbers even! Besides, new members bring so much fresh energy and insight to any congregation...they help us to move forward with new life and creative ideas. So let's keep up the all-important work of being a welcoming and growing UU congregation...keep up all the welcoming/integrating work you do!

Covenant Groups – **Bonnie Shelton** – a small carved bird – like a “talking stick” only the one holding it may speak...it will focus attention on one person at a time.

Listening and growing from genuine listening (and sharing) with one another...Covenant groups have greatly deepened our caring and concern for one another, it's hard to imagine UUFVB without this vital community-building program...it helps to make us a true fellowship of seekers.

Emerson Center – **Maureen Glennon** -- a set of ear plugs

To help you through some of those Emerson Center rock concerts we host for the wider community can get pretty raucous and loud (though I know you in particular **“like to really ROCK!”**) All the Emerson Center programs (concert, lectures, workshops) are so vital to our community outreach...we are known (and appreciated as one of Vero Beach's primary arts and intellectual centers that enriches life here on the Treasure Coast.

Hospitality/Fellowship – **Gale Parmentier** -- A pound of coffee and a dinner plate and utensils.

Gale you (and so many others) work to ensure that we have an abundance of fun fellowship events here...potlucks...lectures...dances...wine and cheese events. Such events are the “HAPPY GLUE” that holds us together as a congregation. A colleague I worked with at River Road: **“Church should be fun!”** Planning events just for the sheer fun of being together...building fellowship and camaraderie. **SO KEEP THESE FUN EVENTS COMING!**

Pastoral Care – **Amy Maddalozzo** – The UUFVB caring quilt and note cards

As I said last Sunday, most pastoral care we do for one another in this congregation will be (must be) natural, informal, organic...yet there is a place for the planned outreach and care of the Pastoral Care team. Work with the interim minister Rev. Kaaren Anderson to re-strengthen your pastoral care team...and make sure that everyone in need feels our true human warmth and support as a congregation.

Facilities Council – **Al Parmentier** – A can of touch up paint and brushes and trowel

Al, we have thanked you many times for all the loving/devoted care you (and your team) give this beautiful campus...YOU ARE AMAZING! Make sure we keep up our responsible stewardship of this wonderful/expansive facility...investing in our congregational future and our outreach to the community. THIS IS NOT OUR PRIVATE CLUBHOUSE, BUT AN OPEN LABORATORY FOR US TO LIVE OUT OUR FAITH WITH ONE ANOTHER AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY AND WORLD.

Aesthetics Committee – **Jan Mathrani** -- A framed painting

Aesthetics are important, not an “edifice complex” but for everything we do here at UUFVB for ourselves and others. Again, not a private clubhouse but a positive public (safe and beautiful) place for all.

Administrator – **Kim McIntyre** – **Memorial garden urn and trowel for the scattering of ashes**

This is a sacred place for all of life's important "rites of passage" This is a place where (with gentle hearts and hands) we preside over welcoming new persons to life, sending marriage couples forward to their family future, cope with medical treatments, and lovingly facilitate a final departure at death. May this building be here – for many generations to come – as a safe and secure and loving place for all of life's holy milestones.

The newsletter – **Bonnie Shelton** – **a ream of printing paper**

Communication is so important (all congregations struggle with keeping all the members and friends truly informed and "in the loop". Under your leadership we have one of the best congregational newsletters in the UUA! May we keep our communications here at UUFVB be regular, concise, interesting transparent.

Finance Committee – **Spike Vrusho** -- **The Stewardship Canvass "Foot Warmer" and money bags props**

Scott explains "foot warmer/furnace image"

The finance committee (and all the financial operations – book keeper, accountant, administrator, treasurer -- of the congregation) have a real ministry amongst us. Money (in the temple) is not 'filthy lucre' but is rather the "capital of vision and mission." Some people complain about "being asked for money in church" but never seem to complain when everything happens just as it should on Sunday morning (full/capable staff, great music and inspiring preaching, wonderful Sunday School, beautiful building...or when we are here in this conservative community to be the voice of social justice, or reason). So keep the money coming so we can be empowered to do all the good things we do (for ourselves and the wider community and world).

Fair Trade – **Pam Pelliccia** – **a red coffee mug to thank you for providing coffee for all UUFVB events**

The Fair Trade Corner is such a vital ministry of our congregation. It serves to reminds us (as Unitarian Universalism preciously teaches) that everything in the world and humanity is connected...and that social justice, equality and "fairness" matter! So keep the coffee, chocolate bars, clothing and beautiful hand-crafter objects coming...not only is it fun, it teaches us our irretrievable belonging to everyone around the globe.

The Endowment Committee – **Jim Brewer** --

The page from our will acknowledging Collins' and my \$150,000 bequest to UUFVB. Other gifts – my college, my seminary, UUSC, United Against Poverty of Indian River County. Keep the

endowment strong to see the congregation through good times and bad (some of our new England Churches have wisely used and depended on legacy gifts for 300 years)

Adult Enrichment committee – **Pete Kersey** – **Various Adult Ed Curriculum**s

Pete, may you and the AE committee help us to always keep growing intellectually and spiritually. Life-long learning is a watchword of Unitarian Universalism...we can never stop and somehow be satisfied that “we now know everything we will ever need to know.” Help us to keep exploring and growing in the ways of the spirit.

Community Service – **Rachael Hanks** – **An apron for preparing transitional meals**

You and your Transitional Housing Meal Committee do such important work out in our community. Hunger affects some 25% of the people in Indian River County, most especially those obliged to live (at least for awhile) in transitional housing). As Unitarian Universalists may we always remember OUR DUTY AND OBLIGATION to compassionately care for others, most especially those in basic human need.

Social Justice – **Barbara Lipton** – **The protest event bullhorn**

Barbara, you have attended quite a few of the protest vigils and rallies we have held at the IRC courthouse to express our social justice commitments as Unitarian Universalists. UUFVB must remain a beacon in this community for our principles and values...first and foremost to defend the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and to lead our “few stubborn ounces to justice, equity and compassion in human affairs. Again, an inward looking church is a dying church...we must embody and express our Unitarian Universalism “out there.”

The Board of Trustees – **Cate Wenzing** – **Anti-anxiety pills**

Yes things sometimes get complicated, difficult, and anxious in a congregation’s life, but keep calm, all will be OK. This is a congregation made up of hundreds of wonderful, smart, caring, generous people you can depend upon...just when you think no one will step up or step forward, THEY DO! You have everything in place that you need to be a great and successful congregation...so take a deep breath and relax!

[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF REV KAAREN ANDERSON IS PROJECTED UP ON THE CHANCEL SCREENS]



The Rev. Kaaren Anderson

Finally, In Absentia (she arrives in just a few days!) I have a gift for the Interim Minister – Kaaren Anderson...picture projected up...in absentia) -- **the key to the minister's office.**

KIM, CAN YOU AS THE ADMINISTRATOR COME UP TO RECEIVE THIS KEY?

I gladly (and with great confidence and calm) turn the key to my office over to Kaaren knowing she is just the right minister to see this congregation into the next chapter of its history. Rev. Anderson is smart, savvy, kind, creative, and committed -- and (thank God) she also knows how to have fun!...what more do you need in a minister??? Please trust her as she guides this congregation forward for the next 2 years. She will undoubtedly ask you to try some new/innovative things that may occasionally be somewhat “beyond your comfort zone.” She will certainly be a different kind of minister than I have been...not better or worse...just DIFFERENT. Her job (by being herself and leading as she best knows how) is to get you ready for the next settled minister who, in turn, will be different from either Kaaren or myself!

And finally for the entire congregation – **A BIG RED HEART Johnna, can you come up to receive this?**

Johnna, last Sunday you told me that your whole/new life here in Vero Beach is about wanting to share love and kindness with others, so you seemed like the perfect person for me to pass this heart along to.

This heart symbolizes the very real and undying affection and love I feel for all of you, the members and friends of this good congregation. As I have repeatedly expressed to my ministerial colleagues and friends around the denomination over the last eleven years, I have been THE LUCKIEST OF MINISTERS TO HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE THIS KIND AND GRACIOUS AND CAPABLE AND COMPASSIONATE CONGRGATION. Let me say it again, **IN ALL OF UU LAND, YOU ARE SIMPLY THE BEST!** During my entire tenure here, you have generously

encouraged and enabled me to be the best minister (both within these walls and out in our wider community and world – like when, you supported my 3 month long charity bike rides across America to raise money for the United Against Poverty agency). Although I am leaving this community now to serve one more congregation for a 2-year interim...I will always carry all of you in my heart. And, because I have been honored by being designated your Minister Emeritus, I have every hope that (from time to time) I will see you again “in the anon.” In the meantime, please know that I will always carry you close to my hart. You have my undying gratitude and affection. And so I do not say “goodbye” but rather “Aloha”...see you soon, my beloved!