

“We Light This Chalice”

Four simple words we hear almost every Sunday morning. We -- all of us who come to UUCN light the chalice of this living faith:

to create worship and to worship together,
to volunteer our time and energy for events and programs,
to help with the tasks of caring for our buildings and grounds,
to join in the tasks of caring for our people, young, old, and in between,
to invest our hard-earned dollars in sustaining this sanctuary of free faith,
to learn to lead in one way or another, learning new skills we can take on the road,
to enjoy companionship along the path of life in times of stress and delight,
to stretch our light out to touch the rest of our Nashua community,
our larger faith community, and the world with help that is real.

We, all of us, light the chalice of this living faith.

Let me draw your attention to the five points of focus of a time of interim ministry. They are: heritage, leadership, connections, mission, and the future.

Heritage: I have learned through the Church History work you did, that you are proud of your heritage, as you have every right to be. This church has been a beacon of hope for the confluence of reason and religion for nearly 200 years. It's building and grounds are beautifully maintained thanks to many dedicated hands. In your history there was a time when the elite families of Nashua were members of this church, and your membership was much larger than it is now. Today you are a congregation that welcomes all people, not just the elite. Here you breathe life into this core principle of our faith. Two questions for tomorrow, or next year, or one day are a) does this beautiful space welcome all as well as it could if we thought about it, and b) what could we do, as individual UUs, to be more welcoming of everyone who comes through our doors? How could each of us help visitors and those considering this faith feel truly welcome by all?

Leadership: I feel privileged to be taking on the work, with your Board, of learning how we can all work more effectively in the Policy Governance™ model. The Transition Team has been remarkable in its commitment to and fulfillment of the tasks of a time of transition. My experience of the committees I've had a chance to interact with is that you are amazingly committed to the work you do, and deeply thoughtful in your approach. Some committees have been doing their good work for many years; some, like the Ministerial Search Committee, are new this year. Every one is important to the sense of connection and shared mission we have to offer all who come here. We are working very intentionally on creating clearer more “user-friendly” ways to get involved. A question for tomorrow, or next year, or one day might be how we institutionalize the idea that everyone needs a sabbatical year or two; a time to rest and refresh, every few years or so. No one should have to lead year after year after year after year.

Connections, Mission, and the Future:

It is a testament to the commitment of the membership of this congregation that so many ways to connect thrive here...through music and the arts, through community service and lifespan education, through work, play and theological reflection. And during this year I've watched you connect with the larger denomination, both when denominational folk come to us, and when we attend district events, or even General Assembly.

In addition, this year Mike Wilt, Mary Licking, the Stewardship Team, the Board, our wise financial gurus, Sherri and I have been committed to figuring out, just what number best describes what size this congregation is. It impacts our program expectations, our staff expectations, the budget we can afford and our fair share commitment to the denomination. Knowing, together, who and what this church really is today will lead you to the best possible decisions for tomorrow. If the reality is that this congregation is significantly smaller than everyone thought, some of those decisions may be hard. I believe that you know what kind of a congregation you want to be and become. I believe you will deal well with hard decisions, for this faith we share is a real world faith.

I need to take a moment to say a special thanks to our staff: Sandy Martinage, Jed Holland, Chris Parker, and Sherri Woolsey. They have born gloriously with my lack of knowledge of how things work around here, led me in learning, respected my confusion about what an Executive Team is supposed to do, and whether that does or does not work in our current configuration. They have tried, with good hearts and profound commitment, to respond to the many changes and new goals I've asked of them. I am proud to have served with them this year.

You, the people of this congregation, have a strong sense of mission to make this a safe and spiritually uplifting place for all folk of all ages to come together in mutual support, learning, growing, and reaching out as a true beacon of hope in the community, and the larger world. An answer to my last question for the future is already being worked on by the Board and Transition Team: what process can we put in place so we can receive with grace, safety, and gentle exploration whatever conflict comes our way; for in any community of more than one, it will come. Conflict itself is neutral; it's the way we respond that determines whether it can bring us to that deeper understanding and trust through which any community can thrive.

Every Sunday for a while now, we've been saying these words together:

Love is the spirit of this church
And service its call.
Let this be our covenant:
 To dwell together in peace,
 To seek the truth in love,
 And to help one another.

May the ideas held in these words be our guides into the year to come.

Respectfully submitted, *Rev. Olivia Holmes*